

702 8/16
LETTERS

TO A
FRIEND

THE FIRST
Concerning the END and DESIGN
of PRAYER, &c.

To which is added,
A DISSERTATION of *Maximus Tyrius's*, trans-
lated from the *Greek*, concerning this ques-
tion, *Whether we ought to pray to God, or*
no? With REMARKS upon it.

THE SECOND
The DOCTRINE of PREDESTINATION
Review'd, &c.

By GEORGE BENSON.

The SECOND EDITION, Corrected and Enlarged.

L O N D O N,

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THE
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OF THE
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OF THE
NATION

AND
THE
STATE

OF THE
UNION

AND
THE
WORLD

AND
THE
FUTURE

THE FIRST LETTER.

THE
END and DESIGN
OF
PRAYER:

OR,

The REASONABLENESSE of praying to an
unchangeably wise, powerful, and good GOD.

In answer to the objections of the late Earl of
ROCHESTER, Mr. BLOUNT, and other modern
Deists.

JOB xxi. 12-----15. *They take the timbrel and harp,
and rejoice at the sound of the organ. They spend their
days in wealth, and in a moment go down to the grave.
Therefore they say unto God, "Depart from us; for we
"desire not the knowledge of thy ways: What is the Al-
"mighty, that we shou'd serve him? and what profit
"shou'd we have, if we pray unto him?"*

The First Letter.

THE
END and DESIGN

OF
PRAYER

OR
The Reasonableness of trying to be
unchangeably wise, powerful, and good.

In answer to the objections of the late Earl of
Rocheester, Mr. Brouncker, and other modern
Deists.

For xxi. 12. — If God took the world, and left
and return at the end of the world, the world
would be as it was, and in a manner, as it was
before, except that God, "I have seen as it was"
"before the beginning of the world: what is the
"world, what are men, what are beasts, what are
"plants, in what is the present time?"



THE
END and DESIGN
OF
PRAYER.

DEAR SIR,



AS religion is now under the severest examination, both among friends and enemies, it was (you may remember) the subject of our last conversation: And after I had told you, that I could see nothing unreasonable in praying to an infinitely wise, powerful, good, and unchangeable being, you made me promise to write down my sentiments, that you might peruse them at your leisure; which I now do with all imaginable readinesse.

B

You

You and I have long agreed in this, that there can't be a more severe reflection cast upon any thing that goes under the name of *religion*, than the representing it as something not fit to be inquired into, and examined. The *libertines* are thereupon ready to insult, and the *inquisitive* can't forbear suspecting that what is kept in the dark, is unreasonable, and can't stand the trial; for *truth* fears not the light, but then appears in its native beauty and lustre, when most curiously pry'd into, and most publickly laid open.

THE objections of the *licentious*, and the inquiries of *studious* men, have generally issued in the service of *true religion*; by giving occasion to the pious and learned to ingage in the noble cause, to clear up the truth, to separate it from error and falshood, and to set it in the strongest point of light.

NOR should we at this day have had so many difficulties solved, had it not been for the attempts of *libertines* to overthrow all that is sacred, or for the queries of *virtuous* and *inquisitive* men, who are always the best friends to *true religion*. The number of *rational believers* is thus increased; and that confirm'd by conviction and evidence, which was perhaps at first receiv'd only from a reverence to our teachers, or upon some other as weak foundation.

AMONG the many difficulties which *scepticks* have started, this concerning *prayer* is none of the least, *viz.* " To what end shou'd
 " a *God* of infinite wisdom, goodnesse, and
 " power,

“ power, be petition’d to do what he sees
 “ and knows to be good and proper for any
 “ of his creatures ? And how absurd must it
 “ be, to imagine that such imperfect beings as
 “ we are, can by our *prayers* (or any thing that
 “ we can possibly allege) move, or persuade,
 “ an all-wise and unchangeable being ?”

BUT in order to do them justice, I will give you their objections in their own words. Mr. *Blount*, in his notes upon *Apollonius Tyaneus* his life, p. 38. has these words ; “ Some few of
 “ the *beathens* used no prayers at all, as thinking that the *Deity* was not to be moved by
 “ intreaty, or bribed by sacrifice^a; and partly,
 “ because they held it a presumption in man
 “ to direct *God* what to do, and what to
 “ forbear.”

ACCORDING to Bishop *Burnet*’s representation, the ingenious and witty Earl of *Rochester* seems to have been of the same opinion ; “ For he was persuaded that *prayers*
 “ cou’d not be of much use, since that were
 “ to look on *God* as a weak being, that
 “ wou’d be overcome with importunities^b.”

^a See *Maximus Tyrius*’s Dissertation, &c.

^b See Bishop *Burnet*’s life of the Earl of *Rochester*, p. 53.

In the former edition I mentioned the following passage from my Lord *Shaftsbury*’s *Charact.* vol. I. p. 170. viz. “ They [*the antients*] esteemed this [that is, *soliloquy*, or *self-examination*]
 “ a more religious work than any *prayers* or other duty in the temple ; which I understood as a reflection on *prayer*, and other parts of public worship : But as my Lord *Shaftsbury* might possibly design no more, by these words, than to point out the comparative excellence of *soliloquy* ; --- I have not here ranked him among those who have represented *prayer* as an uselesse, or ridiculous thing.

IN order to answer them fairly and fully, I will make them all due concessions, and do grant freely,

I. THAT *prayer* was not instituted to inform *God* of any thing, as if he did not know it of himself.

THE best foundation in divinity is to form just and worthy notions of the attributes of *God*: That he is endowed with *knowledge*, is manifest from his works; and, as he is a *necessary being*, his *knowledge* must be *infinite*. And if he be omniscient, this first observation is confirm'd beyond dispute; for 'tis impossible to inform him that knows all things, inasmuch as what is infinite admits of no addition. He that made us, knows our frame, and all our circumstances, what we are, and what we do; nay, what we can be or do, in all possible cases, and upon all suppositions.

UPON this account there's no occasion for our much speaking; for *our heavenly Father* knows what things we have need of, before we ask him^c. The *heathens* might fancy that their gods wanted to be informed; but this is unworthy of him, whose understanding is infinite.

II. NOR was *prayer* instituted, in order to importune infinite goodnesse, as if it were slow and backward to exert itself; or as if we cou'd move *God* by our importunity to depart from

^c Matt. vi. 7, 8.

his steady, unchangeable measures of counsel and action.

No, *God* is wise, and good, and unchangeable, and therefore neither needs to be urged to do good, when and where 'tis proper; nor can he (upon any account) be induced to vary from the scheme, which infinite wisdom dictated.

INDEED all comparisons fall short, and rather lessen than aggrandize the thing: But (*if I may be allowed to compare small things to great*) you may as well go to persuade a rock to melt, or a mountain to remove out of its place, as use words to persuade *God* to do an unwise, unholy, or unjust thing.

THAT *Pathos* of eloquence which would move the most resolved and dispassionate among men, cou'd not affect *God*. Your favourites, *Tully* and *Demosthenes*, cou'd have prevail'd nothing in such a case; neither uplifted hands, nor weeping eyes, nor the most moving rhetoric of looks, words, or action, wou'd make any impression. I acknowledge (with *Mr. Blount's* *beathens*) *that God is not to be moved* (in such cases) *by intreaties, nor bribed by sacrifice; and that it wou'd be presumption in man to direct him* (in such, or in any other instances) *what to do, or what to forbear*. And with my Lord *Rocheſter*, *that the Deity is not so weak a being as to be overcome by importunities*. There is no bribing, flattering, melting, or over-awing him; *he's of one mind, and who can turn him?* The generality of the
beathens

beatbens might hope perhaps to prevail with their Gods by a clamorous importunity, and much speaking; but *christians* are forbid such vain repetitions.

FOR our requests can no more alter the divine purposes, than our praises can add any thing to God's perfection or happiness.

By this time I suppose you may fear that I have given up the point; and inquire,
 " To what end then shou'd we pray at all,
 " if we can neither inform, nor persuade
 " God? In other cases we argue for the rea-
 " sonableness of a thing, from common con-
 " sent; and if this will hold (you may al-
 " lege, that) it seems to be the voice of
 " reason, and the prevailing sense of man-
 " kind, that men shou'd call upon God by
 " prayer, and praise, for a supply of their
 " wants, a redress of their grievances, and
 " as a grateful acknowledgment of all their
 " mercies. And thus the *holy scripture* also re-
 " presents the matter, when it advises *chris-*
 " *tians, To be careful for nothing, but in every*
 " *thing, by prayer and supplication, with thank-*
 " *giving, to make their requests known unto*
 " *God*^d; and seems to set it forth as a possible
 " thing for man to move God, by intimating,
 " that *Jacob wrestled, had power with God,*
 " *and prevail'd*^e: That *Elias* was but a man,
 " and yet by his prayer he prevail'd with God,
 " to withhold rain from the land of *Israel* three

^d Phil. iv. 6, 7.

^e Gen. xxxii. 24, 28.

“ years and a half; *And again he prayed, and*
 “ *the heavens gave rain, and the earth brought*
 “ *forth her fruit^f. And has not our Lord*
 “ *also bid his disciples, Ask, and ye shall receive;*
 “ *seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be*
 “ *open'd unto you?* confirming it thus, *for*
 “ *commonly such as ask* (importunately of men)
 “ *receive, And he that earnestly seeketh* (at the
 “ *hands of his fellow-creature) findeth; and unto*
 “ *him that knocketh, it shall be opened:* And how
 “ much more might successe be hoped for,
 “ from the infinitely wise and affectionate
 “ father of the universe, the common friend
 “ and parent of all? And again he declared,
 “ *that whatsoever they shou'd ask in his name,*
 “ *they shou'd receive* g.

“ To this end spake he the parable of the
 “ woman's troubling the unjust judge, till she
 “ obtain'd her request^h; and the parable of
 “ the man that went to borrow loaves of his
 “ friend at midnight, who also prevail'd by his
 “ importunityⁱ: Nay, 'tis usual in *scripture*
 “ to represent *God* as an affectionate parent,
 “ listening to the cries of his children, and
 “ mov'd by them^k.

To all which I answer,--That as to the com-
 mon and prevailing sentiments of mankind,
 they are of no moment, unlesse they be found-
 ed upon truth and reason. And as to the
 queries from *holy scripture*, 'tis evident that

^f James v. 17, 18.

^g Matt. vii. 7---11. Luke xi.

9---13.

^h Luke xviii. 1---8.

ⁱ Luke xi. 5---8.

^k Matt. vii. 9, 10, 11. Psal. ciii. 13.

God has not a body, tho' several parts and members of the humane body be in *holy writ* ascrib'd to him. In like manner all humane passions, defects and imperfections are to be far remov'd from *God*, and such representations to be look'd upon, only as accommodations to our capacities, as humane ways of speaking, or familiar comparisons, by way of condescension to us, and to our manner of thinking and expressing ourselves.

FOR whoever wou'd understand the *holy scriptures*, must remember that they are calculated to plant and promote *religion*, even among the lowest of mankind; and, as such, their language is popular, and speaks according to common appearances. They meekly condescend (as our *Blessed Lord* did) to *instruct the poor*, and that after a most easy and familiar way, speaking of things spiritual and divine, in the language and after the manner of men.

THUS, in the case before us, inasmuch as men want to be informed of the circumstances of the distressed, and to be importun'd to do good; the *sacred writers*, by way of *analogy*, apply this to *God*. Not that he really wants to be informed, or importun'd to help, where 'tis proper; but only that the events are, in some measure, alike; *viz.* *God*, in all proper cases, grants mercies in consequence of mens praying for them; as parents regard the requests of their obedient or penitent children.

BUT though the events be alike (and upon that account they are spoken of in the same phrase

phrase, and manner) yet the principles, from which such events proceed, are by no means alike; for earthly parents are commonly moved by pity and sympathy, which have a mixture of passion and uneasiness in them. *God* acts only from pure reason, and supreme goodness. An earthly parent may mistake the case, and grant requests, or deny them improperly, through an excess of fondness, or for want of natural affection; but unerring wisdom and infinite goodness can never do so. So far the *analogy* holds, that our *heavenly father* (as well as an earthly parent) bestows favors upon the praying and well-disposed, which he withholds from such as are of a different temper and practice.

THUS, I think, I have answer'd the *queries* from *holy scripture*, and fully vindicated my own concessions.

I THEREFORE now return to the *objections* which the *sceptics* pretend to draw from *reason*.

BUT, before I proceed to what I reckon the chief end of *prayer*, and the *main solution* of their *difficulties*, I would propose this as one, and that no inconsiderable advantage of *prayer*, *viz.* that *God* does hereby most graciously condescend to our infirmities, in allowing, nay, inviting us this way to relieve our hearts, when most oppressed, by pouring out our moans and complaints into his ear, as one that is most tenderly concern'd for us, and kindly and mercifully disposed to relieve us: for though he

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knows

knows it more exactly than we can lay it before him; yet 'tis a great relief under any pressing calamity to unbosom ourselves, and give a vent to the fullness of our hearts, in the presence of a wise and compassionate friend, even though he be perfectly acquainted with the case, and all its attending circumstances. To talk it over to ourselves, and in *perfect solitude* to give our distressed thoughts, *breath* and *accent*, can by no means afford that relief, which the laying it before a kind, powerful, and wise friend is capable of affording. And, finally, there are many cases which it may be improper to spread before any one, except the infinitely wise and benevolent *ruler* of all, who considers our frame, who pities our infirmities, and who will not expose us, nor take any advantages against us from his knowledge of our distresses; no, nor of our many crimes and follies neither, if we do but sincerely repent of them, and carefully guard against them for the time to come.

BUT to return to the *main solution*, I wou'd ask (though *omniscience* can't want to be informed, nor *infinite wisdom and goodness* to be importun'd to do what is proper, nor the *unchangeable ruler of the universe* alter his counsels, or measures of action; yet) where is the absurdity, if we should suppose that he (who has laid the *plan* of the *natural world*, in such an amazing harmony, order, and proportion; and that has adjusted things to things in such exact number, weight and measure) may have laid

laid the plan of the *moral or rational world*, in a signal and harmonious correspondence to the *natural world*; as well as connected, and proportioned the several parts of the *moral scheme* to one another? And that thus there may be a distinction frequently made, even in this world, between such as pray, and such as neglect it?

NAY, does not ^a *history, reason, and observation* evidently shew, that in several instances 'tis actually so? *i. e.* the events in the *natural world*, which bring *judgment or mercy* to *mankind*, are, by the infinite wisdom and power of the *creator* and *governor* of all, so calculated, as only to be consequences of his framing the *heavens* and the *earth*, and preserving their being and motions in that state and order, to which (in pursuance of their first disposition) they naturally tended.

AND yet how exactly do such consequences happen at the appointed seasons, so as to *reward the righteous*, and *punish the guilty*?

“ To this purpose it deserves to be inquired,
 “ whether *God* did not calculate the structure
 “ of the *primæval heavens* and *earth*, so as
 “ greatly to conduce to the *paradisaical* hap-
 “ pineſſe, to bleſs man in his ſtate of inno-
 “ cence and integrity? And afterwards, as re-
 “ markably ſuit the courſe of nature to the
 “ ſtate of things, *to curſe* the earth with barren-
 “ neſſe, as a juſt judgment upon the diſobedient?”

^a See Dr. Burnet's *ſacred Theory of the earth*.

“ DID he not by the particular *constitution*
 “ of the *heavens* and the *earth* before the flood,
 “ occasion the *world*, *that then was*, to perish
 “ by an *universal deluge*, when the *earth* was
 “ degenerate, and *all flesh had corrupted their*
 “ *ways*?

“ ^b AND did he not very wonderfully, by
 “ the like appointment, cause a *vulcano* to
 “ break out in a dreadful shower of fire and
 “ brimstone, nigh the place where *Sodom* and
 “ *Gomorrha* stood, destroying them suddenly,
 “ together with two neighbouring cities, just
 “ when their sins were grown to an enormous
 “ height?

“ AND who, without the strongest preju-
 “ dices, can observe, how by the same wise and
 “ over-ruling *providence*, he made way for the
 “ spread of the *christian doctrine* (when the
 “ time fixed in the *scheme* of *divine providence*,
 “ and pointed out by *antient prophecies*, was
 “ fully come) by the great increase of know-
 “ lege, and the easy intercourse thro’ the *Ro-*
 “ *man empire*?

“ AND may not the fruitfulness of the *land*
 “ of *Canaan*, when it was proposed as a re-
 “ ward to *Israel’s* obedience; and its present
 “ barrenness, when no such end is to be an-

^b If any of these instances be found to be *miraculous*, and not the consequences of the *original plan* of *creation* (as indeed I am not positive, and therefore have proposed them as queries) ’tis only placing them under the head of *interposition*, and leaving every one to substitute what instances he finds to be just and well grounded; for (tho’ I may not have hit upon them) I am persuaded there are numberless instances of such an *harmony*, which lie open clearly to the view of superior beings, tho’ the film upon our eyes, in this state of darkness, and imperfection, may intercept the glorious prospect.

“ swered

“ fwered thereby; be confidered as another in-
 “ ftance of the harmony (which is founded in
 “ the *plan of creation, or providence*) between
 “ the *material and intelligent* world? And, fi-
 “ nally, are there not a great many things to per-
 “ fuade us, that *God* has made the prefent earth
 “ of fuch a frame and ftructure, as that it tends
 “ towards a *conflagration* (as naturally as the
 “ *antediluvian earth* tended towards an *uni-*
 “ *verfal deluge*) and that it will actually blaze
 “ out, when the affairs of *providence* are pre-
 “ pared for it, and the inhabitants of this *earth-*
 “ *ly globe* are ripe for *judgment or mercy*?”

THUS has the vaft, the incomprehenfible
 wifdom of *God* adapted the *natural* and *moral*
 world one to another, fo as to run hand in hand,
 and correfpond in their great *crifes*, and fome
 more remarkable conjunctures: And a clofe
 obferver will find it fo in many cafes of a more
 particular nature. Thus the vicious and loofe
 (who are generally the contemnners of *prayer*
 and devotion) are punifhed with feveral difeafes
 and difafters, to which the pious and the tem-
 perate are not expofed; the rash, the paffionate,
 and the proud, are more obnoxious to evils
 than the religious and meek, the humble and
 refign’d; and the fame holds good in many
 other cafes.

WELL, and if *God* have thus laid the *plan*
 of the *moral world*, then he may be *unchangea-*
ble, and yet grant favors in answer to *prayers*,
 which favors he would have granted to none
 but the *fupplicant*. Nay, upon this fuppo-
 fition, he wou’d be *changeable*, and vary from
 his

his *scheme*, if he equally regarded the *praying* and the *prayerlesse*.

SUCH a notion of the *original plan* of things advances the glory of *God*, and magnifies his knowlege and wisdom, goodnesse and power, to a stupendous degree; inasmuch as it implies his foreseeing ^c who wou'd pray, and who wou'd not pray; and when, and with what propriety and sincerity, every *prayer* wou'd be offer'd up, that ever shou'd be made upon earth, from the *creation* to the *consummation of all things*. And that he has calculated a *scheme*, which is large enough to take, in an inconceivable variety of cases, and, in the common course of things, very frequently to proportion blessings to the frequency, propriety, and sincerity of every man's petitions.

THIS I call the *plan of creation*.

BUT 'tis altogether reasonable to think that *God* has also appointed his own interposition (either mediately, or immediately) in some particular cases, as part of the *original plan of his providence over this earth*; because no

^c Such persons as suppose the *prescience of contingent events* to be contradictory and absurd, must allow that the *great and wise governor of the world*, is steadily resolved to deal with men according to their conduct; whenever, or by what means soever, he comes acquainted therewith. But, as they can't ascribe so much (as I have done) to the *plan of creation*, they must ascribe more to that of the divine government and interposition. However, I must confesse that, for my own part, I know not how to account for so many clear and expresse *prophecies*, without allowing *the divine prescience*. Undoubtedly, the treachery of *Judas*, and the malice and wickednesse of the *Jews*, in procuring the death of OUR LORD, were as plainly *contingent events*, as any that can be named; and yet they seem to have been predicted, not as probable, but as certain.

scheme (perhaps) can be so calculated as to reach the designed end, without the *divine interposition*, in some particular cases and conjunctures. Nor is this any more than what is unavoidable, where the temporal interests of men are so frequently opposite and inconsistent. Not but that I reckon the *divine interposition*^d to be rare and unusual, and only where the case does more eminently require it; and am thoroughly convinced, that neither the *natural course of things*, in consequence of the *plan of creation*, nor that *divine interposition* (which is only a part of the *plan of providence*) does always make a *distinction* between the *righteous* and the *wicked*, in this *present state* of things; which only argues that the *scheme of providence* reaches into *another state*; and, in this enlarged view, we may affirm that *God* will put a *thoro'* and *universal distinction* between them that seek his face, and them that seek it not.

To set this matter in a different light, I wou'd further observe, that among *men* there is a certain *temper* and *disposition of mind* which a *wise giver* expects in such as he *favours*; and that, without a regard thereto, bounty and beneficence wou'd be weaknesse and imprudence. Will a wise man be as kind to the carelessse, the perverse, and the ungrateful, as to the suppliant, the modest, the humble,

^d *Nec Deus interfit, nisi dignus vindice nodus
Inciderit.*

Horat. de arte poet.

and

and the grateful^e? "Till the *eternal, unalterable relations of things cease*, God can't be supposed to love the impious and disobedient, as well as the pious, the penitent, the virtuous, and the supplicant.

IF

* *Xenophon's Cyropad.* edit. *Hutchinson*, 4^{to}, l. 1. p. 67, &c.
 κ) μὲν δὲ, ὡς πατέρ, ἐφ' ὃ Κυρῷ, κ. τ. λ.
 "Father, said *Cyrus*, I will always continue using my utmost care, according to your instruction, to render the gods propitious to us, and willing to give us their advice and direction; for I remember to have heard it from you, that as from men, so likewise from the gods, the most likely person to obtain his suit, is not he, who, when he is in distresse, flatters servilely; but he who, in his most happy circumstances, is mindful of the gods: And you used to say, that it was in the same manner that one ought to cultivate friends." "Therefore, child, said he, upon the account of this your care, you now apply to the gods, and make your requests to them with the more pleasure, and you have the better hopes to obtain what you ask, appearing to your self conscious that you never neglected them." "Truly, father, said he, I am for that reason in such a temper of mind, with respect to the gods, as to reckon them my friends."----"Well child, said he, do you remember those other opinions that we heretofore agreed in? as that in all things that the gods bestow, such men as have acquir'd skill and knowlege in them, act and succeed better than they who are ignorant in them? that the laborious succeed better than the idle? that the diligent and the careful live with more security than the negligent and carelesse? and that therefore rend'ring our selves such as we ought to be, we shou'd then make our prayers to the gods for their blessings?" "Yes, indeed, saith *Cyrus*, I do remember to have heard these things from you, and I was forced to submit to your reasoning; for I know you used to say, that it was downright impiety for such as had never learned to ride, to supplicate the gods for victory in engagements of horse; or for such as had never learned the use of the bow, to ask the superiority at this very weapon, over those who understood it; or for such as knew not how to steer, to pray that they might preserve ships in the quality of pilots; or for such as have not sown wheat, to pray that they might have a good crop of it; or for such as are not watchful in war, to pray that they may be preserved in safety;

IF therefore it can be made appear that *prayer* tends to plant and cherish this temper and disposition in man, which *God* loves, and for which, in the *scheme of providence*, he has provided blessing and mercy; and that the neglect of *prayer* is attended with the contrary disposition, which *God* disapproves, and for which, in the *scheme of providence*, he has provided *punishments*, ---- then the difficulty vanishes at once; and there's no contradiction in saying, that an *unchangeable God* may answer *prayers*; nay, that 'tis reasonable for men, and their plain duty, to pray to a *wise and good God*; inasmuch as they are thereby made more meet to partake of his favors.

THE *rational and apostolical* distinction of our duty is, into that of *piety, benevolence, and self-government*; or, in other words, *our duty towards God, towards our neighbour, and towards ourselves*. For, tho' we may in some sense be said to bear some *relation* to the *whole universe*, as we are the *inhabitants* of this *earth*, and this *earth* a part of the *planetary system*, and this *system* only a part of the *universe*, that bears some *relation* to other *systems*; yet, as the other *planetary systems* are at such an immense distance, yea, and the *globes* of this our *system*

“ty; for that all such things were contrary to the settled laws
“of the gods; and you said, that such as made impious prayers
“would probably meet with disappointments from the gods; as
“such would fail of success with men, who should desire things
“contrary to all human laws.”

These passages are so very remarkable, as coming from the pen of an *heathen*, and so much illustrate my present subject, that I thought it better to give the *English* reader Mr. *Abley's* translation, than quote the *Greek*, which few would understand.

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are so far separated, we have no knowlege of what passes there, nor consequently any duty arising from thence; but only that of a general *benevolence* to all rational beings.

AND tho' we allow that God, if he sees fit, may send *angels* upon some peculiar occasions, to guard and assist us; yet their agency is so commonly according to the *natural course of things*, and their presence, at any particular time, so uncertain, that the *relation* between us and them is more rarely brought into the account. Tho' reverence is unquestionably due to *superior beings*, when 'tis known that they are present; and gratitude is always due to the benevolent, and more especially to our benefactors. But, tho' the presence of finite beings is not so easy to be discover'd, when they themselves are invisible, and their actions not distinguishable from the common course of nature; yet, we may be assured that *God* is always present, tho' invisible, because he is necessarily so: Men are frequently present with us and visible, and can share in the effects of our behaviour, when absent; and we ourselves are compounded of *body* and *spirit*, which bear a *mutual relation* to one another, and require *mutual duties*.

TAKING this, therefore, for a just and comprehensive distinction of our duty; I shall briefly go over each of the *branches*, to show what a practical influence *prayer* has upon every one of them, and how much it disposes men to a more watchful and constant discharge of every part of their duty.

As

As to *godlinesse*,---By much thinking upon any thing, we commonly grow better acquainted with it; and of all knowlege, the knowlege of *God* is to be persued, for it leads to *life eternal*¹. 'Tis impossible to pray, without thinking upon *God*, the great object of religious worship; and I am perswaded, that 'tis very much owing to *prayer*, that the being and perfections of *God* are so generally known and acknowleged.

FROM considering that there is a *God*, we naturally pass on to consider the *relation* between him and us.

“ THIS is the *first cause* of me, and of all things; from whom I receiv'd my being, and all my powers and faculties, and upon whom I depend every moment! The omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent law-giver and judge! My kind benefactor, who sustains me, and provides for me, observes my whole deportment, and is a constant witness to all I think, and speak, and do! Justice requires that I imploy my being, powers, and faculties, and all my enjoyments, agreeably to the will of my creator and benefactor, my law-giver and my judge, *i. e.* rationally, or piously and virtuously! Wisdom requires that I should imitate the most perfect being, to the best of my abilities; and gratitude requires, that I should please my best friend as much as I can!”

¹ John xvii. 3.

Now homage and honor, imitation and obedience are the best oblations I can offer him. An humble, well-disposed heart, and a pious prudent life, are *sacrifices with which his soul is always well pleased.*

SUCH intense and frequent thinking upon God must enlarge our knowlege of him, and tend to impresse his image and similitude; and methinks we should be glad to know, and make use of, the proper means to obtain so very valuable an end: for we are more concern'd to make him our friend, who has the disposal of the rewards and punishments of another state, than the greatest malefactor can be to procure the friendship of any earthly judge. Let the wicked seriously, and for some time, try the influence and efficacy of daily *prayer*; and they'll find it will do more towards reforming them, than all their *admired heathen authors*, or the *boasted power of philosophy*. For when we, in an humble and composed manner, addresse ourselves to God by *prayer*, it not only diverts the thoughts at present, from sin and folly (which the turning to any businesse, or amusement might, in some measure, do;) but *devout prayer* has also an apt tendency to root out the love of sin, and to plant in its stead good dispositions and virtuous desires.

As to our duty towards our neighbour;--prayer does likewise influence us to the discharge of this part of our duty: for this comes recommended to us, both as the will of God, and the benefit of mankind. Now *prayer* not only

only composes the soul to that thoughtfulness and deliberation (which is the most proper frame for considering all obligations;) but it likewise reduces the mind to resignation, and a flexible temper, so as to incline us *to have respect unto all God's commandments*; and among these, *justice and charity* are none of the least. And *prayer* does not only cherish this general good disposition; but that part of *prayer*, commonly called *intercession*, does more immediately tend to plant and cherish *love, which is the fulfilling of the law*.

As for instance ----- Do I *pray* for an enemy? This must make, or suppose me, inclin'd to forgive him. Do I *pray* for *friends*? This implies that I continue to wish them well, and strengthens the sacred bands of friendship, refines and exalts the noble passion, and makes it *christian and divine*, lays the foundation deeper, and is the most proper method to make it sincere and perpetual. Do I *pray* for all mankind? This enlarges, or maintains, my charity and benevolence towards all such as are of that nature, of which I myself partake, and cherishes my disposition to do any of them good, as they fall in my way, but especially to the sincerely virtuous and holy.

Do I *pray* for superiors, inferiors, or equals? This were to trifle with the great God, if it were not accompanied with resolutions of filling up all relations in life with proper duty. *Prayers* for the afflicted, when rational and sincere, are accompany'd with what succour
and

and relief we can conveniently afford them. And when we petition God to instruct the ignorant, reclaim the wicked, or assist the righteous to persevere, 'tis our duty to use endeavours (as well as *prayers*) for promoting so desirable a work. *He that converteth a sinner from the error of his way, doth save a soul from death, and hide a multitude of sins.*

As to our duty towards ourselves;---as we are a compound of *soul* and *body*, *prayer* reminds us of our duty towards both, *i. e.* chiefly to mind the affairs of the *soul*; and in subordination thereto, the affairs of the *body*.

Confession of sin brings our faults to mind, and may well make us sorry and ashamed, and sincerely resolve to behave in another manner.

Petitions for mercy teach us our own weak and dependent state, and may humble us, and should make us look for help from above, and to act as obliged, dependent beings.

Praise and thanksgiving secretly reproach us, that we have made no better returns for so many and such great favors; and point out what ought to be our future conduct.

HE that daily goes to *God* by *prayer*, has a daily check upon his conscience, and a daily spur to repentance, care, and watchfulness; he lives as 'twere under a constant sense of the observation of the supreme ruler, which (if any thing can) will make him circumspect. If such a one can't find out the bent and inclination

clination of his own heart, and the tenor and habit of his own life ; --- no man can. And if he don't prefer the soul to the body, rational to sensual enjoyments, and eternity to the things of time, his prayers are fruitlesse, and his expectations vain.

The sum of what has been said comes to this. Infinite, unerring wisdom, uncontroulable power, and superlative goodnesse, have fix'd, unalterably fix'd, *the terms of acceptance*, with which terms the creatures are made acquainted: and as they eventually comply or disobey, their requests are finally heard or deny'd, and they themselves rewarded or punished. If *daily prayer* cherish in any man such a pious disposition, then God will hear and answer him; not because he prostrates himself before God, and puts up^m now and then, a few petitions; but because the petitions he puts up, either model his heart (or flow from an heart already modelled) to such a frame and disposition as the wise and good *governor* of all may rationally expect in such as partake of his favors.

IF such a person be deny'd any particular request, he'll in the end be no loser by it;

^m *Hunc collatis precibus adoramus, ab hoc iusta, & honesta, & auditu ejus condigna deprecamur; non quo ipse desideret supplices nos esse, aut amet subterni tot millium venerationem videre. Utilitas hac nostra est, & commodi nostri rationem spectans. Nam quia proni ad culpas, & ad libidinis varios appetitus vitio sumus infirmitatis ingenta; patitur se semper nostris cogitationibus concipi, ut dum illum oramus, & mereri ejus contendimus munera, accipiamus innocentie voluptatem, & ab omni nos labe, delictorum omnium amputatione, purgemus. Arnob. l. i. p. 18.*

r all things work together for his good : and what of injoyment he wants in this present state of trial and discipline, shall be abundantly made up to him in a future and better state ; *the scheme of providence* being so calculated, as to reach beyond the present state of *existence*. We need not wonder then, that good men ask for many things in this life, which God does not think proper to grant them. This is not a state of retribution, and therefore many things that might gratify us, are at present withheld, as unfit for us ; ⁿ and nothing cou'd be a greater curse, than to grant us every thing that our fancies might desire, or wish for, in this state of darkness and imperfection : Whereas in a state of recompence, the desires will not exceed the injoyments.

THUS we may know, that God will answer prayers, without *immediate visions* or *revelations*, or without any such *impressions*, as may intimate to us our *present* acceptance °.

I WILL only add, that the prayers of a good man may, in many cases, be rationally expected to *avail* for others ; inasmuch as, when God grants such requests, he grants them, because the things petition'd for, are wise, and proper,

ⁿ ζευ βασιλευ, τα μεν εαδλα, και ευχομενοις και ανευκτοις,
Αμμι διδου. τα δε δεινα κ' ευχομενοις απαλεξοις.

The prayer of the cautious poet in *Plato*.

*Optima da nobis, seu te, Pater, illa rogemus,
Seu non ; & contra nocitura rogitantibus arce.*

° See Dr. Calamy's life of Mr. How, 8^{vo}, p. 22.

and

and rational in themselves, (without which circumstances he will never grant any request) and because of his great love to piety, which he rewards, honors, and encourages, by thus gratifying the pious man, and regarding the *intercessions* of the virtuous and holy.

THIS, understood in a more noble and exalted sense, may in some measure point out to us the *reasonableness* and *prevalency* of the *intercession* of our great high priest, and *advocate with the father*, *Jesus Christ the righteous*, who is able to save to the uttermost, all those that come unto God thro' him; seeing he ever liveth, making *intercession* for them.

As I have laid before you the *solution*, allow me to conclude with some *corollaries*.

Corol. I. THE *objections* of the *scepticks* are not insuperable; and particularly 'tis *rational* to *pray* to an *infinitely wise, good, and unchangeable God*; inasmuch as *prayer* transforms us into his *moral image*, and plants, or cherishes, such a frame of soul, as, according to the wise *scheme of providence*, he will vouchsafe to bless.

Corol. II. IF God would bestow all other blessings upon us, without our *praying* for them, 'twould be an unspeakable detriment to us; if we thereby lost that pious and humble, resign'd and obedient temper, that sense of *God* and *religion*, and of the strength of our obligations to virtue and holiness, which are acquired and promoted by frequent *prayer*.

Corol. III. *Prayer* is a duty of *natural*, as well as of *revealed religion*^a. 'Tis true it is only an instrumental duty, and has the nature of a *mean* to an end; *that is*, to improve us in the love of virtue and goodnesse: But whoever would attain any end, must make use of the necessary means. Food is not life itself, but only one of the means of life; but it ought not therefore to be neglected: On the contrary, it deserves to be esteemed, and made use of, for that very reason, *viz.* because it is one of the necessary means to that important end. They don't seem to me, either to have considered the matter thoroughly, or to have so much regard for virtue, as they ought to have, who neglect *prayer*, and plead that they have no occasion to make use of it.

Corol. IV. 'Tis not *words* but *thoughts*, that are principally to be regarded in our *prayers*^b.

For

^a Mr. *Wollaston* (in his *Religion of nature delineated*, p. 120. &c.) has proved *prayer* to be a duty of *natural religion* from other considerations, particularly from the relation in which we stand to the *first being*, and from the *reason* and *truth* of things.

^b *Vir bonus, omne forum quem spectat, & omne tribunal,
Quandocunque deos vel porco, vel bove placat;
Jane Pater, clare, clare quum dixit, Apollo:
Labra movet, metuens audiri, Pulchra Laverna
Da mihi fallere, da justum sanctumque videri:
Noctem peccatis, & fraudibus objice nubem.*

HOR. lib. I. ep. 16.

*Haud cuivis promptum est murmurque, humilesque susurros
Tollere de templo; & aperto vivere voto.*

Mens bona, fama, fides, hac clare & ut audiat hospes:

Illa sibi introrsum, & sub lingua immurmurat, O si

E bullit

For *God* and *man* regard the wishes and desires of the heart, as the only genuine and sincere *prayer*. I own, that an addressing *God* with our wishes is the common notion of *prayer*; but I am satisfy'd, that *God* regards the habitual bent and inclination of the soul, (whether covetousness, ambition, or voluptuousness) more than *transient petitions*, tho' they should be, for the time, sincere; and consequently much more than the most elegant forms^c, or the most devout expressions, that are not accompany'd with internal desires. Our *thoughts* are our *prayers*, which *God* can understand as well without words, as with them, and according to our habitual disposition may we expect to be treated both here and hereafter.

Corol. 5. How vain must it be to *pray*, whilst men are devoted to vice and immorality? *When you make many prayers, I will*

Ebullit patrum præclarum funus; & O si

Sub rostro crepet argenti mihi seria dextro

Hercule! pupillumve utinam, quem proximus hæres

Impello, expungam! &c. &c. &c.

PERS. sat. 2.

^c But inasmuch as a decent and agreeable performance of this great duty shews an higher reverence and regard for *God* and divine things, --- does more promote the practical influence, --- and represents religion as more amiable to mankind in general; I would recommend *Dr. Watts's Guide to Prayer*, &c. chap. 2. --- the noble hints which *Mr. Wollaston* has given in his *Religion of nature delineated*, p. 120, &c. --- and the late excellent forms, which are annexed to the *Plain account of the nature and end of the sacrament of the Lord's-Supper*; --- to all such as are desirous of assistance in performing this duty, with honor and decency, ease and elegance: For there may be as much fervency, and certainly will be less confusion, where there is the most just and happy manner of expression.

hide mine eyes from you.---Your hands are full of blood, Isa. i. 15. If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me, Psal. lxxviii. 18. The Lord is far from the wicked, but he heareth the prayer of the upright, Prov. xv. 28. He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, his prayer shall be abomination, Prov. xxviii. 9. The (most costly) sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord; but the prayer of the upright is his delight, Prov. xv. 8. Now we know that God heareth not sinners, but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doth his will, him he heareth, John ix. 31.

NAY, persons guilty of notorious wickedness have been sometimes so struck with the prodigious greatness and horrible nature of their guilt, that they have not been able to pray, with any hopes of success or acceptance. And, indeed, unless men desire to promote their repentance, increase their virtuous dispositions, and contract, or confirm an habit of piety and holiness, by their stated devotions, they had e'en as good ne'er pretend to them.

BUT if any person desires to cultivate a likeness to God, and a conformity to his will, he can't take a more proper method than that of frequent, fervent *prayer*. And there's no man so likely to be heard and accepted, as he that has this praying frame and temper of spirit.

IN

^a *Immunis aram si tetigit manus,
Non sumptuosa blandior hostia,
Mollibit aversos penates,
Farre pio, & saliente mica:*

HOR. od. 23. l. 3.

Quin

IN a word, if *prayer* makes us better men, it of course renders us more acceptable unto God. And answers to *prayer* are not to be looked upon, as extorted by importunity, or as the consequence of *much speaking*; but as the effects and instances of God's uniform and continued love to the pious and virtuous, which piety and virtue are wond'rously promoted by daily *prayer*.

SUCH holy men, wanting a thoro' knowledge of futurity^e, may ask for things improper; but such things the wise and good God in mercy denies them.

AND *blessed are they that keep his commandments!* They have *infinite wisdom* and *goodness* to chuse for them; *infinite power and unchangeableness* engaged for their welfare! In *prosperity* and *adversity* they have a sure and *faithful friend!* In *sickness*, and at the *hour of death*, they know in whom they have trusted; and may enter upon another state undismay'd, commending their *spirits* into his hands, in whose glorious presence they hope to spend the happy ages of eternity.

*Quin damus id superis, de magna quod dare lance
Non possit magni Messalla lippa propago,
Compositum jus, fasque animi, sanctosque recessus
Mentis, & incoctum generoso pectus honesto,
Hac cedo ut admoveam templis; & farre litabo.* PERS. sat. 2.

^e *Permites ipsis expendere numinibus, quid
Conveniat nobis, rebusque sit utile nostris;
Nam pro jucundis utilia quaque dabunt Dii:
Carior est illis homo quam sibi, &c.* JUVENAL. sat. 10.

LET

LET this encourage us to be frequently upon our knees, that we may keep up a continual sense of *God's* presence with us. This will not suffer us to lie long in any sin, nor to be satisfy'd with low degrees of virtue and holiness: This will keep us serious and sober-minded, and administer comfort to us, when our praying seasons in this world shall be no more.

I am, Dear SIR,

Your's, &c.



POST-



POSTSCRIPT.

THERE are two observations of importance, which seem to arise out of this account of *the end and design of prayer*.

I. As *the principal thing in prayer is its practical tendency*, “ This may suggest some useful “ directions concerning our views in praying ; “ and concerning the drawing up of proper “ forms for our own use, or for the use and “ assistance of others.”

ALL *general forms of prayer* ought to contain the principal branches of virtue and piety. And whoever prays, as the mouth of the people, should commonly go through the most essential duties of the christian life ; that, by hearing such things frequently pray'd over, and earnestly insisted upon, the people may be led more clearly to understand them, to remember them more distinctly, and to make conscience of living accordingly.

’TIS not only the frame of mind, in which any person may be, at the drawing up a form of prayer designed for general use, or when he speaks as the mouth of others in public worship ; ---- but principally the common good of mankind, that ought to be consulted : For he, who consults that, brings most glory to
God,

God, most effectually advances the credit of virtue and true religion, and doth most good to his fellow-creatures.

I WOULD, therefore, with great deference and submission, humbly propose, that all *forms*, designed for public use, whether in one, or many churches, be drawn up so as to take in as large a compass of christian duty as possible, and be regulated all along with this practical view;---that such, as use not any constant and set forms, would have a prevailing regard to that general practical influence, which ought to be *the end and design of prayer*;---and that the stated prayers, both of the family, and of the closet, be directed to this extensively beneficial and important end.

SUCH prayers, as are made for persons in particular circumstances, and upon peculiar occasions, are not to be supposed to take in so large a compass; but it ought to be remembered, that their chief view should be to influence to a better temper and behavior; for that seems to be the most likely method to receive benefit, and to have their particular requests granted, as far as they are rational, wise, and proper.

II. As *the principal thing in prayer is its practical tendency*, “By this we ought to regulate the *language* we make use of, as well “as the thoughts and the method.”

Protestants clearly see the justness of this observation, when engaged in controversy with the church of *Rome*; for, *how absurd is it to pray in an unknown tongue?* But it has not been
always

always attended to, that the same reasoning holds good, with respect to every phrase and expression, which has no fixed or proper meaning : For 'tis not enough that *God* understands what we would expresse ; men must also understand, or else they cannot join in the prayer ; nor can it have the right influence upon their temper, or conduct.

I SHOULD be unwilling to criticise, with rigor and severity, upon the *public forms* used by some ; or upon the *public prayers* of others, who use no stated forms. But, whoever candidly considers this matter, will find, that the language of public prayers is not yet brought to its highest state of perfection ; and I suppose the private devotions of most christians are much like those of the public.

THE *historical books of scripture*, in general, are remarkable for a simplicity of diction, as well as of sentiments ; but the poetical and some of the prophetic books do, more especially, abound with noble phrases and lofty figures, and have numberless instances both of the tender and pathetic, the magnificent and the sublime. --- No style, therefore, can be more proper, in our addresses to heaven, than that of *sacred writ* ; provided it be made use of, with understanding.

BUT, how often has a regard to scripture-language led men, either to improper expressions, or mistaken sentiments ? Dark and difficult passages have sometimes obtain'd the preference to such as are plain and easy ; and such

obscure texts have had a meaning put upon them, wholly foreign to their design: And that meaning, which fancy first stamped upon them, custom has so fixed, that the original sense of the words has been rejected, or never looked after.

ALLUSIONS are undoubtedly fine, when made with judgment, and considered only as allusions; but, in process of time, how often has the allusive sense excluded the real and true meaning? And the number of mistaken passages of scripture hath been thereby increas'd.

BUT the most fruitful source of mistakes, of this kind, hath been an applying texts of scripture to our own case, which the sacred penmen made use of, in speaking of some peculiar cases, that were wholly different from ours. Even their language concerning inspiration and miracles hath been commonly apply'd to christians, in general, tho' the age of inspiration and miracles hath been past and over long ago.

I ACKNOWLEDGE that persons, who have been guilty of crying sins, and abominable vices, may (with great propriety) adapt many of the expressions, which in the scriptures are made use of upon like occasions; but, (if the language, which was peculiar to inspired worship and miraculous operations, had not been so frequently used, concerning christians in common) ---- one might justly have wondered, why those, who have been free from scandalous vices, should nevertheless chuse to confess their sins, in the phrases, which in scripture are made use of,
by

by such persons as had been guilty of murder and adultery; and by the nation of *Israel*, after they had fallen into the abominations of idolatry, and the other shocking vices of some of their most abandoned neighbours!

HATH not this abuse of scripture-language led men to confesse sins, which they were never guilty of? or to load their own crimes with aggravations, which did not belong to them? Has it not induced men to petition for mercies, which they have no reason to expect? and to bless God for favors, which they have never received? Doth it not evidently lead men to misinterpret the holy scriptures? and to apply texts to themselves, or to their neighbours, which were peculiar to persons in very different circumstances? ---- But I am unwilling to proceed; because I chuse not to say, how much error and superstition have been occasioned this way; and how exceedingly *christianity* has been hereby perverted from its original intention.

HOWEVER,----You will observe, that 'tis only the abuse of scripture-language, which I am all along condemning: For when allusions are introduced sparingly and with discretion; when persons, and manners, and circumstances are duely considered, and texts of scripture made use of, according to their original meaning, and in that sense are fairly and properly applicable to our case;----I think the *sacred dialect* is so far eligible, that *there is none like it.*

I WOULD, therefore, propose that in matters of dispute and difficulty, as well as in all points that are of a general nature, a departure from scripture-language, in our public worship, should be industriously avoided: Not only, as that is the language, in which all parties can most heartily join; but, as different phrases gradually introduce different sentiments; and certainly, no words can expresse the mind of the spirit more justly, than those which he has seen fit to make use of. *Adieu.*



THE

The THIRTIETH
DISSERTATION
OF

MAXIMUS TYRIUS,

Concerning this QUESTION,

“ Whether we ought to pray to
“ GOD, or no?”

With some REMARKS.

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“Whether we ought to pray to
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The THIRTIETH
DISSERTATION
OF
MAXIMUS TYRIUS.

S this dissertation is thought to contain some of the most subtle objections against *the reasonableness of praying*; I have taken the pains to translate it, and to add some *remarks* concerning the difficult, or exceptionable passages; tho' I think, that by the general solution *in the letter on prayer*, an attentive reader wou'd be able to answer most of the objections.

HOWEVER, the subject is of that importance, that one wou'd not willingly leave any objection or difficulty without a careful and particular solution.

THE

DISSERTATION.

A Certain *Phrygian*, of an idle disposition, and covetous, catch'd a satyr, a drunken demon, as the fable goes, by pouring wine into a fountain, at which the satyr used frequently to quench his thirst. The *foolish Phrygian* pray'd his captive deity to grant him a request, which it was very much in character for him to ask, and the other to perform. His request was, " That the earth, and the trees, the standing corn, the meadows, and the flowers in the meadows, should be all turned into gold." The satyr granted him his request; but when the land was turned into gold, it brought a famine among the *Phrygians*. Then *Midas* lamented over his riches, and retracted his prayer; no more applying to the satyr, but begging of the *gods* and *goddeses*, that they wou'd restore to him his former plenteous and fruitful poverty, and turn the gold upon the heads of his enemies. These things he now prayed for, earnestly and with tears; but all in vain.

I CANNOT but applaud this fable both for its wit and beauty and for the truth to which it directs us: For what does it intimate, but the prayer of a madman, who desires to have things which are evil, and begs that he may obtain his request; but when he hath obtain'd it, repents and condemns it? By the captivity,
the

the chains, and the wine of the satyr, the fable insinuates, that there are some who petition, and others who use violent methods, to obtain some particular thing; in which, if they succeed, they will needs have it that the *gods* bestowed it upon them. But they ascribe it falsely to the gods; for from *God* proceeds nothing but what is good: whereas the blind gifts of blind fortune are like the favors we receive from drunkards.

BUT what shall we say to the *Lydian king*? was not he madder than the *Phrygian*? when he prayed to *Apollo* that he might have the kingdom of *Persia*, and sought the favor of the god, by making him a present of a large quantity of gold; treating him as the people do a magistrate, who loves to take bribes? And, having frequently receiv'd this answer from the oracle of *Apollo* at *Delphos*, "When *Cræsus* passes over the river *Halys*, he will overturn a large empire," he understood it according to his own inclinations; and passing over *Halys*, overthrew the large empire of the *Lydians*.

IN *Homer* we find the *Greeks* praying thus ^a,

O thou, almighty father, guide the lot,
 T' a worthy champion for the Grecian state!
 This task let Ajax, or Tydides prove,
 Or he, the king of kings, belov'd by Jove.

^a II. H. v. 179, &c.

Jupiter granted their request; and when
Old Nestor shook the cask, by heav'n inspir'd
 Leap'd forth the lot, which every Greek desir'd,
 And fell on *Ajax*.-----

^b BUT, though *Priam* interceded for his own native country, and daily sacrificed oxen and sheep to *Jupiter*, he would not answer his prayers.

ON the other hand, to *Agamemnon*, who invaded another's dominions,

-----^c by partial Jove
A safe return was promis'd to his toils,
Renown'd, triumphant, and enrich'd with
spoils,
From Ilium laid in ruins -----

And *Apollo* would not revenge the injury of *Chryses*, till he freely told him of it, and put him in mind of the steam of the choice sacrifices, which he had offer'd; ^d and then indeed he directed his arrows against the *Grecian* army, not sparing even the mules, sheep and dogs; and that plague continued for nine days. What do you mean by these things, O prince of poets? Do you think that *the god* is a glutton, and a lover of bribes, and like the

^b See the remarks which follow this dissertation.

^c Il. B. v. 111, &c.

^d Il. A. v. 36. &c.

generality of mankind? And shall we take this as your true meaning,

• *That the gods, -----*

Are mov'd by off'rings, pray'rs and sacrifice?

Or, on the contrary, that the *deity* is inflexible, and neither performs the desires of men, nor is moved by their prayers? ^f For to change his mind and repent, is so far from being worthy of *God*, that 'tis unworthy even of a good man. For a man who easily alters his mind and repents, if he changes from the worse to the better, he had not sufficiently deliberated upon the matter; but, if he changes from the better to the worse, he makes a foolish and wicked change, ---- neither of which can be ascribed to *the deity*. ^g Now he who prays, is either worthy to obtain what he prays for, or unworthy; if he is worthy, he shall obtain what he wants, tho' he doth not pray. If he is not worthy, he shall not obtain it, even tho' he prays: for he that is worthy and omits to pray, is not therefore unworthy, because he prays not; neither is he who is unworthy to receive a favor, and prays that he may obtain it, therefore worthy, because he prays. On the contrary, he who is worthy to receive, and gives *God* no trouble [*by praying to him*] is so much the more worthy to have what he wants: Whereas he, who is unworthy, and likewise

• Il. I. v. 493. See Mr. Pope's translation.

^f See the second remark.

^g See the third remark.

troublesome, is also, for that very reason, unworthy. To the one we ascribe modesty, and a firm trust in the deity: ----- a *firm trust in the deity*, because he believes that he shall obtain what he desires; and *modesty*, because he acquiesces, tho' he doth not obtain it. But to the other, folly and wickedness; ---- folly because he prays to *God*, and wickedness, because he is unworthy to obtain his requests. For, suppose *God* was the general of an army, and one, who is fit only to carry the baggage, should desire of the general the place of one who bears arms; and another, who is fit to bear arms, should be silent; would it not be to the advantage of the army, to leave the former with the baggage, and rank the latter among those who bear arms? And yet the general of an army may be ignorant, corrupted with bribes, or deceived; but none of these can happen to the *deity*. Wherefore he will not bestow any thing upon them that pray, if they are unworthy; neither will he withhold any thing from the worthy, even tho' they should not pray. For ^has to all things men pray for, some of them *providence* inspects, others *fate* renders necessary, some *fortune* changes, and others *art* manages. As to *providence*, 'tis the work of *God*, *fate* is the effect of necessity, *art* is the work of man, and *fortune* the effect of chance. And human life is subject to all these. The things, therefore, which we pray for, may be referred either to the *providence of*

^h See the fourth remark.

God, or to the necessity of *fate*, or to the *art* of man, or to the course of *fortune*.

If they be referred to *providence*, what occasion is there for *prayer*? For if there be a *divine providence*, either *God* regards the whole, and attends not to particular things (just as kings govern cities, but extend not their care to every individual man) or his *providence* respects particular things. Now chuse which of these you please: Would you have it that the *providence of God* regards the whole, in general? You are, therefore, not to trouble him with your *prayers*, for he will not grant your requests, if you ask any thing which is inconsistent with the good of the whole. What, suppose the members of the body should assume a voice, and every one of them, when affected with a disease, and going to be cut off by the physician, for the preservation of the whole, shou'd beg of him, that he would spare it; would not the physician answer, " 'Tis not reasonable, that for your sake, ye poor wretches, the whole body should perish; but you must perish to preserve that." ---- And this is what is done in the universe. The *Athenians* suffer a plague, the *Lacedemonians* an earthquake; the *Thessalians* an inundation, and mount *Etna* consumes with flames.

You call the destruction of these a corruption; ⁱ but the physician understands the reason of these things, and regards not the par-

ⁱ See the fifth remark.

particular members, when they pray, but preserves the whole; this is his care. ^k But suppose God regards particular things, even then we ought not to pray; for that would be the same thing ^l as for a sick person to ask for medicines, or proper food from his physician; for, if it be right, he will give it to him, tho' he do not ask for it; if it be wrong, he will not give it, tho' he desire it. Therefore none of these things, which are done by *providence*, ought to be petitioned, or prayed for.

BUT what shall we say to those things which proceed from *fate*? Why, here also *prayer* would be ridiculous; for you may more easily persuade a king than a tyrant. Now *fate* is like a tyrant, and both ungovernable and inflexible; it, as it were, puts a bridle on the human herd, with which it violently drags them along, and forces them to obey. Just as the tyrant *Dionysius* did the *Siracusians*, *Pisistratus* the *Athenians*, *Periander* the *Corinthians*, and *Thraſybulus* the *Miletians*. For in popular states, persuasion and prayer, compliance and intreaty may do something; but under tyranny, force over-rules all, as it does in war.

^m *Preserve my life, Atrides, king of kings,
And in reward you'll have the richest things.*

[*Thus prayed Adrastus, but prayed in vain.*]
What rewards then shall we give to *fate*, that

^k See the sixth remark.

^m Il. 2. v. 46.

^l See the seventh remark.

that we may be loosed from its necessity and chain? what gold? what obedience? what victims? what prayers? Seeing *Jupiter* himself has not found out any way to avert it; but thus laments ^a,

*Alas, Sarpedon! cruel fate ordains
That godlike son of mine should press the plains.
Already on the verge of death he stands,
His life is ow'd to great Patroclus' hands.*

To which of the gods doth *Jupiter* pour out his prayer for his son?

AND *Thetis* likewise thus cries out,

° *Hear me, and judge, ye sisters of the main!
How just a cause has Thetis to complain?
That her brave son is doom'd to so much sorrow!*

SUCH are the *destinies*, *Atropos*, *Clotbo* and *Lachesis*; such is *fate*, immutable, firmly fixed, and that which determines the lives of men. Why then should any one pray to *fate*, which is inexorable?

BUT neither are we to *pray* for the things which proceed from *fortune*. And in this, indeed, much less than in the other cases; for there is no treating with a mad ruler, where neither counsel, nor judgment, nor prudence holds the reins of government; but all is sub-

^a Il. Γ. ver. 433, &c.

° Il. Σ. v. 54, &c.

ject to fury, blind impulse, mad freaks, and successive passions. Such is *fortune*; unreasonable, mad, imprudent, deaf, unaccountable, which ebbs and flows like the *Euripus*, is tossed about, and under no direction of a pilot. Why, therefore, should any one *pray* to a thing so fickle and foolish, so unequal and unfociable?

LASTLY, next to *fortune*, let us consider *art*. What carpenter would pray for a good plough, when he hath the *art* to make it himself? What weaver will pray for a handson garment, when he has the *art* to make one? What smith will pray for a beautiful shield, when he has the *art* to make one himself? What brave man will pray for presence of mind, when he has valor already? Or what good man will pray for happiness, when he is already possess'd of virtue?

FOR what, therefore, can any one pray to *God*, which belongs not to *providence*, *fate*, *art*, or *fortune*? Do you ask for riches? Don't trouble the *Gods*, you don't pray for what is good. Don't trouble *fate*; you ask for nothing necessary. Don't trouble *fortune*; she doth not bestow any thing upon the needy. Don't tire *art* with your importunities; for you find *Menander* saying, "The arts will not grow old, unless they have a covetous master." And is not the thing really so?

ARE you now a good man? ^p Change your manner of life, cheat and defraud, per-

^p See the eighth remark.

sue your interest, and get money by turning pander, or huckster, by robbing, tricking, perjury, sycophantry, or bribery. Do you desire victory? If in war, hire soldiers; if in a court of judicature, suborn witnesses. Do you desire to get by traffic? Ships, the sea, and favourable winds, procure this. The market is open, and what you want may be purchased; why do you disturb the *gods*? Be not afraid to venture upon any thing that is vile and wicked, and you may grow rich, tho' you were *Hipponicus*; conquer, tho' you were *Cleon*; obtain your wish, tho' you were *Melitus*.

BUT, if you apply with your *prayers* to the *gods*, you go to a tribunal which is severe and inexorable; for ^q there is no *god* will endure one who prays for things which are not to be desired; nor grant you things improper to be granted. The *deity* narrowly inquires into, and rigidly examines the *prayers* of every man, directing and overruling all things according to what is most expedient; not giving way to the desires of men, as is often done in human judicatories; tho' they lament, earnestly implore help, and scatter much dust upon their heads; nay, tho' they upbraid the deity, as *Chryses* upbraided *Apollo*,

* *If e'er with wreaths I hung thy sacred fane,
Or bulls and goats on flaming altars laid.
Apollo, bear my prayer!-----*

^q See the ninth remark.

^r Il. A. v. 38.

H

BUT

BUT the deity says, " If you seek for good things, with a good design, and are your self good, or worthy of the things you desire, you shall receive them : " But if you seek for such things, you have no occasion to pray, for you shall receive them, even tho' you hold your peace. But you will say, that "*Socrates* went into the *Pyraeum*, to pray to the goddess ; and he advis'd others to do so ; nay, that the life of *Socrates* was as it were one continued prayer. *Pythagoras* also pray'd, and *Plato*, and every one besides, that was willing to pay homage to the gods." But do you think that the prayer of a philosopher is desiring those things which he hath not? I look upon it as nothing else but a conversation and discourse with the gods, concerning what he already possesses, and as a testimony of his virtue. Or do you suppose that *Socrates* prayed for riches, or that he might be advanced to the government of *Athens*? By no means. No, he prayed to the gods for virtue of mind, peace, and tranquillity of life, blameless manners, a death full of the hopes of immortality ; but with their permission took them from himself ; all admirable gifts, and such as the gods bestow. ^u But, should any one ask for a prosperous voyage by land, or plentiful crop at sea ; a plough of a weaver ; or a cloak of a carpenter ; he

^t See the tenth remark.

^u See the eleventh remark.

would

would go away unanswered, empty, and disappointed.

O *Jupiter*^u, *Minerva*, and *Apollo*! watchful inspectors of the manners of men, you ought to have none but *philosophers* for your disciples, such as can receive your instruction into their great souls, and in their lives yield a beautiful and plenteous harvest! But this sort of agriculture is very rare, and doth not yield its produce, but with difficulty, and late in life; and then it shows itself after different manners in different persons. But in human life there is need of this rare and small spark, as in a dark night there is occasion for a small light. For that which is excellent in human nature lies in a narrow compass, and yet by this small matter the whole is preserv'd. But if you take *philosophy* from human life, you take away that which animates, inspires, and preserves it; that which alone can direct you how to *pray*; just as if you take away the soul from the body, you destroy the body; or the sun from the day, you destroy the day.

^u See the twelfth remark.

The end of the dissertation.



REMARKS

On the foregoing

DISSERTATION

OF

MAXIMUS TYRIUS.

- I.  *UT tho' Priam interceded for his own native country, and daily sacrific'd oxen and sheep to Jupiter, he would not answer his prayers: On the other hand, to Agamemnon, who invaded another's dominions, &c.]*

THIS is an antient and very common objection against a *particular providence*, viz, "that the just and pious are often miserable; while the impious, or unjust flourish in prosperity."

WHEREAS

WHEREAS this objection will intirely vanish, if this life be a state of trial, wherein the faculties of men are to be exercised, and their virtues to be tried and put to the proof, in order to prepare them for a state of recompence. For, in a state of trial, there must be prosperity and adversity, opportunities, temptations, and difficulties; otherwise, how shall mens faculties be exercised, or their virtue put to the proof? The very nature of such a state supposes various difficulties and hard trials; that they, who behave best here, may be the most happy hereafter."

----- *Know that virtue soars above
What the world calls misfortune and affliction.
These are not ills; else would they never fall
On heaven's first favorites, and the best of men.
Our God, in bounty, works up storms about us,
That give mankind occasion to exert
Their hidden strength, and throw out into practice
Virtues, which shun the day, and lie conceal'd
In the smooth seasons and the calms of life.*

ADDISON.

HOWEVER, I am fully satisfy'd, that even in this life, the virtuous are not so often miserable, nor the vicious so commonly successful and happy, as men, who judge by external appearance, are apt to imagine; for we are incapable, in many cases, of judging concerning the virtue or vice, the happiness or the misery of

of other men. The trueſt virtue and piety lie moſt in ſhade and privacy; and vice wants a ſhelter, and moſt commonly ſeeks one. So, likewise, happineſſe and miſery lie very much out of view; and two men, in the ſame outward circumſtances, may be one of them very happy, and the other very miſerable.

BUT, ſuppoſe men were commonly happy, or miſerable, juſt as the world, which ſees only their outward circumſtances, judges of them; and that ſome good men are greatly afflicted, while other bad men triumph in their wickedneſſe; all that can fairly be concluded from this, is, that the *plan of providence* reaches into another world, and is nor terminated within the narrow bounds of this preſent, tranſitory life.

II. *To change his mind and repent, is ſo far from being worthy of God, that 'tis unworthy of a good man, &c.*]

“THAT 'tis unworthy of *God* to repent,” is a very juſt obſervation. He cannot change for the better, and he will not change for the worſe. There is an eternal, unalterable difference between good and evil, as much as between light and darkneſſe; evil is at all times, and in all places deformed and unreaſonable, and good is always and every-where amiable and wiſe; neither can they, by any art, any will, or any power whatever, become otherwiſe. Now what good and evil are in themſelves, that they always appear to be to the divine underſtanding; *that is*, the one always wiſe
and

and right, and the other foolish and wrong. The power of *God* is such, that he is under no controul from any being whatever; neither has he any thing to hope for, or to fear.--- What motive, therefore, can he possibly have to refuse what is most amiable and wise, just and good; or to chuse what is odious and detestable, deform'd and base? Such a being can have no temptation to biasse him from following the dictates of his own perfect understanding; and he who never chuses wrong, can never have occasion to repent, or change his mind.

BUT this cannot justly be said of the most virtuous man, whose understanding is finite, and who is surrounded with many and strong temptations to evil.

Maximus Tyrius himself doth elsewhere, with great justnesse make this inquiry, “^x What man is so good as to pass through life without a fault?” And if the best of men offend, certainly 'tis not unworthy of the best of men to repent and alter their conduct.

III. *Now he who prays, is either worthy to obtain what he prays for, or unworthy; if he is worthy, he shall obtain what he wants, tho' he doth not pray, if he is not worthy, &c.]*

THIS is one of the objections against *praying*, on which this *philosopher* has laid the greatest stress; but when 'tis examin'd, it will be found to have no weight in it.

^x τῆς ἀνὴρ ὅπως ἀγαθός, ὡς διαλθεῖν βίον ἀπ[α]ίσις; Dissert. 26.

'TIS readily acknowledged, that he who continues wicked, cannot reasonably hope to obtain his request, tho' he should *pray*; because his vices render him unworthy. But the other assertion [*viz.* " that the virtuous, or worthy man, *as he calls him*, shall obtain what he wants, tho' he doth not *pray*; nay, that he shall sooner obtain it, because he doth not *pray* :"] proceeds upon two suppositions, which are both of them groundlesse and false: The one is, that such as *pray*, are troublesome to the *deity*; and the other is, that a man may be as virtuous and worthy without *prayer*, as with it. Whereas,

I. " HE who *prays*, cannot be troublesome to the divine being, let him pray never so often, and never so importunately." What notions must they have had of *God*, to think that such persons as constantly worship him, and intensely pray unto him, can be troublesome to him? His ears are ever open, and his eyes are always upon the children of men. He is infinitely perfect, and infinitely happy, and therefore cannot be disturbed, or made uneasy, by the most frequent and earnest addresses of the whole rational creation, suppose they should addresse him all at once. Before the world was, the *deity* was perfect and happy; and if the whole creation was annihilated all together, he could suffer nothing by it. The existence and thoughts, the speeches and actions of the creatures, can make no alteration in

in the divine perfection, or interrupt his happiness.

2. "A man cannot be as virtuous, and as acceptable to *God*, without *prayer*, as with it." Had *Maximus Tyrius* attended to it, that *prayer* is a part of *natural religion*, and one of the best means for promoting *virtue*, he surely would not have made this objection; for consider *prayer* in this view, and then no man can, with any reason, hope to obtain any favor, tho' he neglects to *pray*; much less that he shall the sooner succeed without *prayer*, than with it. He insinuates, that the abstaining from *prayer*, is a sign of modesty and wisdom: But what want of modesty doth it argue for a man daily to meditate on the highest moral character, the great pattern and standard of virtue and all perfection? What folly! daily to prostrate ourselves before him? to acknowledge our dependance upon him? and the strong and numberless obligations we are under to submission, virtue, and a regular obedience?

REPEATED meditations upon such important subjects, under an actual sense of the presence and inspection of *God*, must be one of the noblest means of *virtue*. ---- To make use of the best means to promote *virtue*, is in itself a *virtue*; and he, who is most virtuous, is the most beloved by the *Deity*, and may reasonably expect the greatest favor; ---- if not in this present world; yet in the future state of recompence. This, however, ought carefully to be attended to, that a man, continuing in
I vice,

vice, cannot, with any reason, hope that his *prayers* will have any influence upon the *Deity*, as long as they have none upon his own mind and manners.

IV. *As to all the things men pray for, some of them providence inspects; others fate renders necessary; some fortune changes; and others art manages, &c.]*

As to *fate* and *fortune*, they are in reality nothing; that is, no real beings, or superintending powers: For suppose by *fate*, we understand the orderly and regular course of things; why, that is nothing but what *God* has settled in *creation*, and continues by his *providence*: 'Tis not like the *fate* of the *heathens*, to which *Jupiter* himself, the supreme *God*, was subject, and which he could not alter. Such a *fate*, as they imagined, has no existence; and, therefore, nothing ought to be ascribed to it. As to *fortune*, if by that we mean success, or an enjoyment of the blessings of this life; that flows from the divine benignity, and not from any such blind or capricious principle as they have represented *fortune* to be. And, as to chance, the parent of *fortune*, it either stands for a mere idea, or 'tis a word without any meaning: If it be used for any thing's happening without a cause, 'tis an idle and groundless notion, or a word without any meaning; for nothing (no effect whatsoever) happens, or can happen without a proper and adequate cause. But, if by *chance* we mean that something comes to pass, the cause of which we
are

are ignorant of, or that 'tis to us an unexpected and unforeseen event, then *chance* stands for a mere idea, and is used (not to intimate that the thing had no cause, but) merely to expresse our ignorance and surprize: 'Tis not any real being, agent, or superintending principle; and, therefore no more ought to be ascribed to it than to *fate*; nor has human life any concern with either of them.

As to the other two [viz. *the providence of God*, and the *art* and industry of *man*] they are to be joined together, and ought never to be separated; that is, we are to use our understandings and best endeavors for the acquiring what we want, and look up to the *providence of God* for succeſſe and a bleſſing: For “ whatever advantages I obtain by my
 “ own free endeavors, and right uſe of thoſe
 “ powers and faculties I have, I look upon
 “ them to be as much the effects of *God's providence* and *government*, as if they were given
 “ me immediately by him, without my acting;
 “ as he is the author of my being, and all my
 “ powers and faculties (whatever they are) de-
 “ pend upon him, and are as it were instru-
 “ ments of his providence to me, in reſpect
 “ of ſuch things as may be procured by them^y”. And, therefore, the *art of man* ought by no means to exclude the *providence of God*; much leſs ought we to *pray* to *art*, as if it were ſome intelligent principle, or ſuperintending power.

^y *Religion of nature delineated*, &c.

V. *But the physician understands the reason of these things, and regards not the particular members, when they pray, but preserves the whole; this is his care.*]

What he has said above, when he compares God to the general of an army, who will not place any man in an improper station; and what he says here, when he compares him to a wise physician, who takes care of the whole, tho' to the destruction of some of the lesser parts; ---- is very fine, and exceeding just; but no argument at all against *prayer*; for we ought always to pray with submission to the wisdom of the *Deity*; and for success, only as far as 'tis consistent with the good of the whole. But surely, it will be most for the good of the whole rational creation, that the virtuous should be finally happy: and *prayer* is a noble mean to promote virtue, and consequently to prepare men for the highest and most perfect happiness.

VI. *But suppose God regards particular things; even then we ought not to pray.*]

This *philosopher* seems to have been dubious about a *particular providence*; but can there be a *general providence* without regarding particular things? Is not the whole made up of the several parts? And how can he regard the whole, who attends not to particulars? Besides, upon little and seemingly inconsiderable things, some of the greatest events depend; and, therefore, to assert that the *providence* of God is not extended to particular things, is in effect to take the government

vernment of the world out of his hands. However, whether a general, or a particular *providence* be maintain'd, providence is an argument for *praying*, not against it. For, "in
 " many cases the order of events, proceeding
 " from the settlement of nature, may be as
 " compatible with the due and reasonable suc-
 " cesse of my endeavors and *prayers* (as incon-
 " siderable a part of the world as I am) as
 " with any other thing, or *phænomenon*, how
 " great soever." In other cases, interpositions may be supposed, though I think the plan of *providence* requires them very seldom; but where neither of these will exactly suit the particular cases of virtuous, or vicious men, it ought to lead us to a view of our future existence, to which the plan of *providence* doth most evidently extend.

VII. *That would be the same thing, as for a sick person to ask for medicines, or proper food, from his physician, &c.]*

As to the argument against *prayer*, which he would here draw from a physician's granting medicines, and proper food, to his patient, without his asking for them; ---- 'tis not in the least any objection against the reasonableness and propriety of *praying* to God; because the comparison doth not come up to the case in hand. For, when we send for a *physician*, 'tis supposed that he will take care to restore our health, without our asking him for proper diet, or physick. And *Maximus Tyrius* does here take it for granted that our health would
 not

not be promoted by such a particular request, But to apply to the highest and most virtuous being, for what we want; and to expect favor from him, according as we excel in *virtue*, tends greatly to promote our virtue. And consequently this comparison fails in the main point.

VIII. *Are you now a good man? Change your manner of life, cheat and defraud; persue your interest, and get money, by turning pander, &c.]*

I do not think that the methods he here prescribes, are such sure ways of acquiring riches, as he seems to have thought them. However, he hath, with great humor and justness, lash'd the vile and wicked methods, which many take to obtain the possessions of this short, uncertain life.

IX. *There is no God will endure one, who prays for things which are not to be desired, nor grant you things improper to be granted, &c.]*

ALL this is just concerning the *true God*, tho' not concerning their fictitious *Jupiter, Apollo, &c.* But what objection is this against *praying* for things that are proper, and may reasonably be desired? One great end of *prayer* is to bring our minds to a submissive temper, to restrain such desires as are unreasonable, and to enable us to acquiesce in the circumstances, which *providence* allots us.

X. *I look upon it [that is, the prayer of a philosopher] as nothing else but a conversation and discourse with the gods, concerning what*
he

he already possesses, and as a testimony of his virtue, &c.]

SURELY, it would not have been unbecoming the wisdom of *Socrates* (who is acknowledged to have been an extraordinary man, and to have died a *martyr* for virtue) to have petition'd for future blessings, as well as thankfully acknowledged the present, or submissively acquiesced; and I am apt to think that *Socrates* really did so.

INSTEAD of calling *prayer* "a testimony of virtue", I should rather have called it an act of virtue; as 'tis an help to virtue, and one of the noblest and best means to promote it.

XI. *But suppose any one should ask for a prosperous voyage by land, or plentiful crop at sea, &c.*]

SUCH absurd things ought never to be the subjects of our *prayers*. Nay, when we pray for such temporal things, as are in themselves reasonable and wise, we should always desire them, only upon the supposition that they are consistent with the good of the whole, and at the same time wise and proper for us.

XII. *Oh Jupiter, Minerva, and Apollo! watchful inspectors of the manners of men, &c.*]

WHAT pity is it that a man of *Maximus Tyrius's* good sense had not inquired into, and embrac'd the *christian religion*, which would have shown him the folly of invoking *Jupiter, Minerva, and Apollo*, and taught him, in the most clear manner, *the end and design*, and consequently, the *reasonableness* of prayer?

EVERY

EVERY *christian* would be such, as he represents his *philosophers*, if they lived up to the rules of their most excellent religion; and then they would, all of them, be proper disciples to a *Deity*, much superior to all those *many Gods*, which *Maximus Tyrius* and other *heathen authors* have mentioned in their writings.

WHEN a man of such acutenesse, as this *philosopher* appears to have been, could not, with all his sagacity, disintangle himself from *polytheism* and *idolatry*; nor find any sufficient reason, why men in general should address the *Deity* by *prayer*;----how ought our hearts to glow with gratitude to *Almighty God*; who, by the *christian revelation*, has dispelled that thick darkness; and set the noblest and most important truths in the fullest and clearest light?

The end of the remarks on the dissertation.



THE

The SECOND LETTER.

THE
DOCTRINE
OF
PREDESTINATION

REVIEW'D:

OR,

The NATURE of the COUNSELS and
DECREES of GOD, and the rise
and occasion of the scripture-lan-
guage concerning them.

K

THE SECOND LETTER

TO THE

DOCTRINE

OF

PREDESTINATION

IN A NEW

VIEW

OF THE NATURE OF THE COVENANTS AND
DISCREPANCY OF GOD AND THE
AND OF THE NATURE OF THE
COVENANTS



THE
DOCTRINE
OF
PREDESTINATION

REVIEW'D, &c.

Dear SIR,



S the doctrine of predestination is frequently referr'd to in the sacred writings of the New Testament, and so much of the solution in the *former letter* [concerning the reasonableness of praying to an infinitely wise, powerful, and good God] depends upon the nature of the *divine fore-knowledge and predetermination*---it may not be amiss to proceed, and communicate to you

K 2

my

my thoughts concerning this other subject; that I may, at least, testify how willing I am to oblige you.

I READILY acknowledge (with you) that the subject is in itself difficult, and subtle enough; though I still think, that it has been rendred much more so, by *voluminous wrangling*.

AND, I need not hint the necessity of a closer attention, to one that reads with your care and exactness.

I REFER you to other authors, for the two different schemes, and the arguments *pro---* and *con---* What I propose, is to adhere to *the simplicity which is in Christ Jesus*, or his doctrine, as it is left upon record in the New Testament. Nor is the subject of small moment, if we recollect what scruples it has raised in the breasts of the pious (especially those of a melancholy disposition) who have been afraid of their everlasting concerns; as if, after all their best endeavors, to be virtuous and holy, and to persevere therein, they might yet, possibly, be found (not the vessels of mercy, but) vessels of wrath, appointed to destruction. ----- And, on the other hand, what presumption it has occasion'd, even in some of the most abandoned of men, who have imagined that, possibly, they may belong to the election of grace, tho' they have gone on to live the lives of reprobates.

Beverovicius, a learned physician, wanted to be satisfy'd, "whether the end of mens
" lives was unalterably fixed and determined?"
before

before he would pretend to practise the art of physick.

I MYSELF wanted to be satisfy'd, upon a twofold account, " whether the actions of
" men, and their final state, were unalterably
" fixed, and absolutely and unconditionally
" decreed? or only conditionally? Or, whether
" the texts in holy scripture, that speak of this
" subject, are to be understood literally, or
" figuratively?"

First, That I might endeavor to regulate my own actions, if free, and might prepare for a future state of happiness, if decreed only conditionally: Or, if otherwise; that I might acquiesce, as much as possible, in what was not to be resisted, or avoided. And,

Secondly, As I was in prospect of undertaking the cure of souls, I wanted to know, " whether
" it would be to any purpose?" As concluding, that it could answer no end, to persuade such as have no power, nor could do any thing but what they did, as chain'd down to one course of action, by an irreversible decree; in which case, arguments and motives, promises and threatnings, reproofs and exhortations, cou'd avail nothing. But if it appear'd that men have some power given them in creation; that they may reasonably expect all proper divine assistance; and that their final and everlasting state is decreed only conditionally; I might set myself to the sacred work of the ministry, in hopes of succeeding in some measure, and doing at least some good.

CONSIDER

CONSIDERING it in these views, I cou'd not look upon it as a matter of mere speculation, or as a subject for men to display their talents, or exercise their wits about ; but as a point of very great moment, and which lies at the foundation of all *practical religion*. For whichever side is found to be true, it draws after it numberlesse consequences : ---The two schemes being as different as light and darknesse, and as distant from one another, as the east is from the west.

SOME studious and well-disposed men (in their unguarded zeal) have sought to recommend the sacred scriptures, by pretending that they contain every thing. Whereas, their plain design is to instruct men only in *religion*.

To search therefore for all arts and sciences in the *Bible*, would be just as wise as to seek *the laws of England in the Grammar*, or a *system of natural philosophy in the Statute-book*. The scripture (like other authors) should be read with that view with which it was writ.

To the poor the gospel is preached ; and for them its language is calculated ; and therefore, it speaks after a popular, familiar way. Studious persons may look beyond common appearances, and may have both pleasure and advantage from their researches : But *day-labourers* must take their notions from common appearances ; and that will answer well enough the common purposes of life, and be ground sufficient for the *essentials* of godlinesse.

HAD

HAD it but been remembred, that God only adapts his thoughts and expressions to the capacities of them, to whom he speaks (as all wise men endeavor to do) the flouts of some late gay and fashionable writers, upon the stile and manner of the sacred oracles, would appear groundlesse, and the fallies of a false wit, which wants the foundation of truth and knowlege.

THE principal design of the *christian revelation*, was not to make men *philosophers*, *orators*, or *criticks*; but (which is of vastly more moment) to make men good, to instruct an ignorant, and reform a vitious world; to teach persons of lower (as well as of higher) capacities the way to true happinesse. Its plainnesse and simplicity may make it despised by those wise and prudent heads, who are puffed up with knowlege, falsely so called; whilst the discovery appears noble, and is grateful to babes; *i. e.* to persons meek, and teachable enough to be instructed in God's own way.

THE insinuation of a parable, the easy and pleasant instruction of an history (with all the moving, artlesse methods, wherewith holy writ captivates the well-disposed) strike the minds of men deeper, and more agreeably than the *dry rules* and *hard terms* of a *system*.

THIS general hint of the plainnesse of sacred scripture, and of the end for which it was given us, might help to clear up numberlesse other points, which are at present perplex'd.

BUT what I would now principally apply it to, is the *doctrine of the divine fore-knowlege*
and

and decrees. And in order thereto, let us see how it holds in other cases.

THE great God himself, his nature, perfections, and operations, are thus popularly described, and so are also spiritual and everlasting things. And thus, indeed, they must be described to us, or not at all. Were invisible things called by proper names of their own, and described, without comparing them to something already known, we could not have any notion of them^z. But God has given us the best notions (we can have) by condescending to compare them to things seen and known. Thus *heaven* is compared to an *inheritance*, to *riches*, to a *city* or *country*, to a *church* or *temple*, to a *crown* and *kingdom*, to a *garden*, to a *banquet*, and to many like things known and highly esteem'd upon earth.

THE *miseries* of *bad men* in the *future state*, are compared to the *pain caused by fire and brimstone*; and by a *worm* (or *serpent*) *perpetually preying upon a man's vitals*, to a *being imprisoned in a dungeon*, and to the *horrors of death*; i. e. it is compared to the most dreadful things, we now know, or can imagine.

ALL which descriptions are not to be taken in the *literal sense*; but only, as intimating the *superlative* happiness of the one state, and misery of the other.

^z *John* iii. 12. If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not; how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?

THUS

THUS also God (though he is a *spirit*) has represented himself, in *holy writ*, as if he had a *body*, in *analogy* to the parts and powers of human bodies; yet our most noble and just ideas of God arise from comparing him to our own *souls*, or *spirits*. And thus the *holy scripture* compares him, when it tells us, that backsliders *his soul* hates ^a. And not only a soul in general, but also the passions of the human soul are ascribed to God, *viz.* *anger*, *vengeance*, *fear*, *hope*, *grief*, *sorrow*, *love*, *pity*, and the like. All which are not to be understood literally, but figuratively. Thus, for instance, God can do all things, that man can do by any, or all the parts and members of the body; can see as well as if he had eyes, hear as well as if he had ears, act as well as if he had hands, understand as well as if he had an head or heart, &c.

AND, again, he will inflict punishment upon the wicked and finally impenitent (from cool reason and judgment) as certainly, as if he was roused with *fear*, *anger*, or *revenge*: And will make happy all the truly virtuous and holy, as if he was touched with *hope*, or *pity*; and his own happiness, in some measure, depended upon theirs. He will alter his treatment of such as backslide, as really as if he had *repented* of the favor shewn them. And so will he act, on the contrary, towards a returning prodigal, as *repenting* of his threatnings.

THUS, the outward actions of God and man are, in some things, alike; but the inward principles widely differ. *Infinite reason*, and

^a Heb. x. 38.

unerring wisdom, always determine God; *humor*, *ficklenesse* and *passion*, too often influence man. When a man *repents*, he actually changes his mind: When God is said *to repent*, there is no change of his mind; the change is in the creature, who, upon becoming better, is approved; upon growing worse, is disapproved: for God steadily favors *goodnesse*, and as fixedly dislikes *wickednesse*. Upon these accounts, *repentance* and *human passions* are ascribed unto God.

THE same comparison is carried on between God and the *human soul*, when he is represented as considering before-hand; *consulting*, and after that *resolving* or *decreeing*.

THE foundation whereof is this: When a Man has a work of time and importance before him, he *pauses*, *consults*, and *contrives*; and when he has laid a plan, *resolves* or *decrees* to proceed accordingly. When we have found this in ourselves, we are ready to apply it also to God; and he, in condescension, has applied it to himself.

THE works of *creation* and *providence*, must be allowed to be *vast* and *stupendous*; and, therefore, we run back, and conceive of God, as a skilful artificer, or wise governor, *deliberating* and *consulting* upon the matter; as laying a plan, and then *decreeing* to proceed according to the counsels of his own will. As if, for a long time before this world was made, or from all eternity, he had been concerting measures, both as to the making and governing of it, and then writ down his *decrees*, which (*like the laws*
of

of the Medes and Persians) were never to be altered. Whereas, to take this [*of God's consulting, and deliberating, before he determined*] in a strict and literal sense, would be the same absurdity, as to ascribe a real human body, and real human passions to the *ever-blessed* God.

It is only in general, a popular representation of his infallible *fore-knowlege*, and unchangeable *wisdom*: i.e. he, in the event, does all things as wisely as a man can possibly do, after *consulting*, and *surveying* a thing on all sides; and likewise, *God* as steadily pursues the most proper method, as one can do, that has foreseen all possible cases, and laid *a scheme* accordingly. There can nothing *new*, or *unforeseen*, start up, and surprise him, so as to put him to any difficulty. He is apprised of all possible events, *knows the end from the beginning, and, from ancient times, the things that have, or shall come to pass*. And, in one word, *all God's conduct* is as *wise*, and *rational*, as if he had the best *laws* and *decrees*, and governed himself by them. But then, though the effects be such, as would argue *consultations* and consequent *decrees* in man; the principles of action widely differ. What need of one moment's consultation in him, who sees all things at one view? what need has *infinite perfection* of the helps necessary to finite and imperfect creatures?

PREVIOUS *consultations*, and subsequent *resolutions*, are only needed, where the ideas are short, finite, and successive; ---defects, or imperfections, by no means to be ascribed to God!

L 2

BUT,

BUT, tho' such *decrees*, as are the result of consultation, or that are looked upon like written laws, to keep by one, and consult as occasion serves; ---- tho' such *decrees*, I say, can't justly be ascribed to God: Yet, that the divine understanding should immediately, perfectly, and in all cases, discern between good and evil; and that the divine will should thereupon determine to choose the one, and refuse the other; ---- seems intirely consistent with the highest perfection, and with our most just and worthy conceptions of the ever-blessed God. Nay, for the divine Being to remain one moment undetermined, concerning the choice of what is good, or the refusal of evil, ---- would argue some imperfection in him, and be inconsistent with our highest, most just, and most exalted notions of him.

HOWEVER, 'tis evident, that in the popular language of scripture, previous *counsels* and subsequent *decrees* are ascribed to the divine being, ---- to point out to us the wisdom, and the steadiness of his conduct.

THE three great effects of divine wisdom and power, are *creation*, *providence* and *redemption*. The *universe* has been created, in all that order and exact harmony; with all that fitness, relation, and mutual dependence, that it could not have carried marks of more wisdom, if the plan had been ever so long in hand, and the whole, and each part, modelled with ages of previous study; and then, the great *architect* had set about the mighty work,
and

and adjusted it, in *number, weight and measure*, according to the *decrees*, or proper *rules of creation*.

THOUGH we comprehend not the entire *system of providence* (which is of a large extent, and calculated for many ages) yet we may observe, that the *material world* is under a very remarkable *regulation*.

AND much more must we suppose it of *intelligent beings*, which are superior in rank and dignity. Our not being able to account for some particulars, should (in *modesty and justice*) be imputed to our ignorance, rather than to the want of wisdom, and propriety in them.

FOR no man can say, that any thing is improper, which does not imply some absurdity, or contradiction; unlesse he could enter into the whole scheme, and knew all the ends and designs of each particular.

WHAT has been said of *providence*, may, in a great measure, be applied to the *work of redemption*, which, without all question, is as wise (and, if understood, would appear as wise) as all possible *consultations*, and *decrees*, could have rendered it.

The period of *innocence* does not fall in here; but from the *lapse* of our *first parents*, to the finishing the *canon of the New Testament*, and the government of the church ever since, it was, step by step, foreseen, and all along conducted with the highest wisdom. The call of *Abraham*, God's treatment of that patriarch, choosing
Isaac

Isaac ^b, rather than *Ishmael*, as heir of the great promise made to *Abraham* and his seed; --- and *Jacob* rather than *Esau*, before the children were born, or had done good or evil; i. e. his bestowing fewer blessings upon the descendents of the one than upon those of the other (which in *Hebrew* phrase, is to love the one, and hate the other.^c) --- The types and predictions of the *Messiah*, the time and manner of his coming; his birth, life, doctrine, miracles and sufferings; his resurrection, ascension, the spread of his doctrine after his departure into heaven, his present dominion, and his returning as judge; --- his casting off the unbelieving *Jews*; and, along with the believing *Jews*, taking in the believing *Gentiles*; --- the terms of *salvation* pitched upon, viz. *repentance*, *faith*, and an *holy, virtuous life*; and the final adjudging men to *rewards*, or *punishments*, according as their works have been, --- are as wise events, and as steadily carried on, as if they had been millions of years in contriving, and after that, writ down among the *decrees*, and in the *records of heaven*, to be punctually regarded, and fulfilled in their season.

BUT, let us not suppose, that to *create*, *govern*, or *redeem the world*, *God* had any need to study upon it, and lay down *rules* to go by, as the wisest men find occasion to do, before they engage in matters of moment.

^b Rom. ix. 7, &c.

^c Mal. i. 2, 3.

A child may be forced to view, first letters, then syllables, and then single words, before he can read a short sentence : But *a man* (that can read well) takes it in at a single glance of the eye. And, *as the heavens are high above the earth, so God's thoughts transcend ours* ; infinitely more than the wisest of us surpass unexperienced children.

HE had no more occasion to *pause*, and *deliberate*, and lay down *rules* for his own conduct, from all *eternity*, than he has now. What! was there any fear of his mistaking afterwards, if he had not prepared *decrees*, and kept such *records* by him, to *consult* (upon occasion) what he himself was to do? Was he wiser before the *creation*? or, had he then more leisure; that he should take that opportunity to settle all his affairs, and make rules for himself, from which he was never to vary?

HE has, doubtless, the same *wisdom*, *power*, and all other *perfections*, at this day, which he had from all *eternity*, without any addition, diminution, or the least alteration; and is now as capable of making *decrees*, or rather has no more occasion for them now, than formerly : his understanding being always equally clear and bright, and his wisdom *infallible*, and *immutable*.

Upon the whole, this is an *allusion*, or *comparison*, to what we find in ourselves ; but *comparisons* must not be strain'd beyond their primary meaning.

Our

Our Saviour will come to judgment, as a thief in the night, i. e. suddenly, and surprizingly; but not to rob and murder, which yet thieves in the night commonly do.

Thus far I have shown you the nature of this popular representation of the thoughts and actions of the divine being; and made it (I hope) clearly to appear, that tho' counsels and subsequent *decrees* are ascribed to *God*, yet his wisdom is equivalent, or superior to them all;---that consultations can be ascribed to him, in no other than a figurative sense;---and that, tho' he cannot be undetermined one moment in his purposes and designs, yet *his decrees* are of a very different nature from the decrees of the wisest *senate*, or mightiest monarch upon earth.

BUT this matter deserves to be consider'd yet further: For, by tracing the language to its first rise, we shall take the most likely method to come at the knowlege of the things, which are thereby signified. In doing this, it will be very proper to consider the rise and original of such language, in general; and how such phrases and expressions came to be apply'd to *christians* in particular.

I. As to the rise and original of such language in general; this is so justly represented, and so well expressed by Mr. *Locke*^d, that I cannot do better than quote his words.

^d Essay on the human understanding, book iii. chap. i. § 5.

“ IT may lead us a little towards the ori-
 “ ginal of all our notions and knowlege, if we
 “ remark how great a dependance our words
 “ have on common sensible ideas; and how
 “ those, which are made use of to stand for
 “ actions and notions, quite remov’d from
 “ sense, have their rise from thence, and from
 “ obvious sensible *ideas* are transfer’d to more
 “ abstruse significations, and made to stand
 “ for *ideas*, which come not under the cog-
 “ nizance of our senses, v. g. to *imagine*, *ap-*
 “ *prehend*, *comprehend*, *adhere*, *conceive*, *in-*
 “ *stil*, *disgust*, *disturbance*, *tranquillity*, &c.
 “ are all words taken from the operations of
 “ sensible things, and apply’d to certain modes
 “ of thinking. *Spirit*, in its primary signi-
 “ fication, is *breath*; *angel*, a *messenger*: and,
 “ I doubt not, but if we cou’d trace them to
 “ their sources, we shou’d find, in all lan-
 “ guages, the names, which stand for things
 “ that fall not under our senses, to have had
 “ their first rise from sensible ideas; by which
 “ we may give some kind of guess, what kind
 “ of notions they were, and whence derived,
 “ which filled their minds, who were the first
 “ beginners of languages; and how nature,
 “ even in the naming of things, unawares
 “ suggested to men the originals and prin-
 “ ciples of all their knowlege; whilst, to give
 “ names, that might make known to others
 “ any operations they felt in themselves, or
 “ any other *ideas* that came not under their
 “ senses, they were fain to borrow words from

“ ordinary known *ideas* of sensation, by that
 “ means to make others the more easily to con-
 “ ceive those operations they experimented in
 “ themselves, which made no outward sensi-
 “ ble appearances: And then, when they had
 “ got known and agreed names to signify those
 “ internal operations of their own minds, they
 “ were sufficiently furnished to make known, by
 “ words, all their other ideas; since they could
 “ consist of nothing, but either of outward
 “ sensible perceptions, or of the inward ope-
 “ rations of their minds about them: We
 “ having, as has been proved, no *ideas* at all
 “ but what originally come, either from sensible
 “ objects without, or what we feel within
 “ ourselves, from the inward workings of our
 “ own spirits, of which we are conscious to
 “ ourselves within.”

To this clear and just account of Mr. *Locke's*,
 I need only add, that, whoever carefully con-
 sider the words made use of upon this subject,
 [such as to *consult*, or *deliberate*, to *know*, or
foreknow, to *decree* or *determine*, or *predestinate*
 and *predetermine*, and the like] will find that
 they take their rise either from *sensation* or *re-
 flection*: that is, from external objects, or from
 the operations of our own minds; and from
 whichever of these two sources they originally
 proceed, they ought not, without great cau-
 tion, and only in the highest and most sublime
 sense to which we can exalt them, to be as-
 cribed to the *ever-blessed God*. Otherwise, we
 shall not think, or speak of him, with that reve-
 rence

rence and justnesse, which becomes us, when we think or speak of the most perfect being.

II. I AM to show how such phrases and expressions came to be apply'd to *God's* gracious designs concerning *christians*, in particular.

As human language, about common affairs, takes its use from sensation and reflection; so doth the language of *holy scripture*: for that is no other than the *popular language*, apply'd to religious matters. The way for us to come acquainted with the divine being, and with the things of another world, is not by looking upon them immediately, and as they are in themselves; but by comparing them to things, which we already see, or know: for even the *gospel*, which is the most perfect revelation of the mind and will of *God*, gives men no new *simple ideas*; it only represents things unseen and unknown, by comparing them to things, with which men were well acquainted before. The language in *scripture*, therefore, is, like that in common use, adapted to the present circumstances and notions of mankind; and by that means 'tis calculated to do the most good.

BUT there are other reasons, why the expressions made use of, concerning this subject, are in the *New Testament* applied to *christians*; such as follow, ----

^e I don't mean by this that there is nothing discover'd by revelation but what human reason might, of itself, have found out. No, I am satisfy'd that *revelation* has made several new discoveries, or given us several new *complex ideas*; tho' I don't apprehend that it has given us any new *simple ideas*.

LONG before the coming of *Christ*, the *heathen world* revolted from the true *God*, to the service of idols and false gods, and therefore they were *reprobated*, or *rejected*.

BUT the nation of the *Jews* were chosen and separated from that corrupt mass, to be the people of *God*, and to be holy unto the Lord; and, therefore, they went under such titles, or denominations as these, the *children*^f; or *sons of God*, *born of God*, or *his first-born*^g, the *saints*^h, the *holy people*ⁱ, a *kingdom of priests*, a *chosen*, or *holy seed*^k, the *elect*^l, the *called*^m, the *people of God*ⁿ, a *peculiar people*^o, the *lord's inheritance*, or the *lot of his inheritance*^p, *holy and beloved*^q, and the like^r.

Now the *gospel*, having the most strict connection with the books of the *Old Testament*, where these phrases frequently occur; and our *Lord* and his *apostles* being native *Jews*, and

^f Deut. xiv. 1.

^g Exod. iv. 22. Hos. xi. 1.

^h Deut. xxxiii. 3. 1 Sam. ii. 9. Psal. xvi. 3. & l. 5. & cxlix. 1; 5; 9. ⁱ Deut. vii. 6. & xiv. 2; 21. ^k Exod. xix. 6.

& xxxiii. 13. Deut. iv. 34, 37. If. vi. 13. & lxi. 9. Jer. vi. 21. ^l If. xlv. 4. & lxv. 9; 22. ^m Isa. xlviii. 12.

ⁿ Judg. xx 2. 2 Sam. xiv. 13. ^o Exod. xix. 5. Deut. xiv. 2. & xxvi. 18. Psal. cxxxv. 4. ^p Deut. iv. 20. & xxxii. 9. & ix. 26, 29. ^q Psal. lx. 5. & cviii. 6.

^r It appears to me to be a very remarkable confirmation of the account which is here given of the rise and occasion of this sort of phrases; ----- that pious and virtuous men, or the people of *God*, were never called his *elect* or *chosen* people, for 1500 years, and more, from the creation. The choosing and separating the nation of *Israel* from the other nations, who were sunk into idolatry and vice, gave the first occasion to this sort of language. And, as the separating the christians from the unbelieving *Jews* and *Gentiles* was a similar event, 'tis no wonder that it should be spoken of in like words and phrases.

beginning

beginning to preach first in *Judea*, or within the borders of the *land of Israel*, the language, in which they preach'd, would of course abound with the idioms and phrases of the *Jewish* nation. And these being the phrases, well known, from their common use among the *Jews*, when the *Messiah* came; 'tis easy to see why such of that nation, as refused to believe and obey him, came under the denomination of the *reprobated* or *rejected*; for they no longer continued to be the *people of God*; and, therefore, they had no more the former appellations given them: Whereas these honorable names and titles were continued unto all such *Jews*, as embraced *christianity*, and upon embracing the christian religion, their privileges were increased.

NAY, farther, besides the subjects of the *Messiah's* kingdom, who were originally of the *Jewish nation*; it was the *decree* or purpose of *God*, from the beginning, instead of the unbelieving *Jews*, to take for his people, under the *Messiah*, all such of the *Gentiles* as would embrace the gospel; and, as the *Jewish nation* generally, or in a body, rejected the *Messiah*, they, who had till then been the people of *God*, were in a body rejected, for refusing him, whom *God* had sent to be their king and deliverer.

THE small remnant of the *Jewish nation*, that embraced the gospel, were received into the kingdom of *God*, which he graciously erected under his own son, the *Messiah*; and so they continued to be his people, along with
the

the converted *Gentiles*, who, all together, made now the church and people of God.

AND, as the *Jewish nation*, before the coming of *Christ*, so the *Jewish* and *Gentile christians*, after his coming, had the names of the *elect*, or *chosen people of God*; and the other appellations, which had formerly belonged to the nation of the *Jews*. And, along with such high and honorable names, they were likewise, by the free grace of God, entitled unto all the privileges of the *chosen people* of God; and nothing, but their own wickednesse and apostacy, could cut them off from such honors and advantages.

As God had determined, from the beginning, to take the *Gentiles* to be his people under the *Messiah*, together with the *believing Jews*; and not only purposed it in his own mind, but foretold it also by many of the *antient prophets*; --- hence arose the expressions concerning his *foreknowing* them, and *predestinating*, or *pre-determining* to *choose*, *call*, *justify* (or *accept*) them, and treat them as his children, or people.---But to examine all the particular phrases, or expressions, as they lie in the New Testament; and to show, from their connection with the context, their original signification, and to what persons they properly belong,---would be a work of a large compasse, to which this *letter* would be only as an *introduction*. I confesse I should be much pleased if some learned man, who has leisure, would engage in so laborious and useful a work; and I am not without hopes that some or other will undertake it.

IN

IN the mean time, I would observe, before I conclude, that the *decrees of God* are some of them *absolute*, and others *conditional*. Concerning the inanimate parts of the creation, they are *absolute*. That the sun, moon and stars should be placed at such a distance, and move within such, and such orbits, or finish their various revolutions in certain fixed periods of time; ---- these things are according to the *absolute and unconditional decrees of God*, and therefore they, of themselves, can never vary; because what he has so determined, he himself, by his own mighty power, doth actually bring to pass; *for who can resist his will?* But should he always determine, and act, after the same manner with creatures, endowed with intelligence and agency, he would destroy their very make and constitution, and treat them (not like what they are, but) like what they are not, that is, like mere stocks and stones, who have no understanding, or agency at all; ---- a thing, which infinite wisdom can never do!

THE *decrees of God*, therefore, concerning the future state of mankind, appear to me to be evidently conditional; for without repentance, faith, and holiness, no man can see the Lord; and no man, who is penitent, believing, and holy (as far as I can learn from the whole scriptural account) shall be condemned, or miss of salvation. These, therefore, are the terms and conditions, on which God has decreed to make us happy, by the mediation of his son Jesus Christ our Lord;
and,

and, without which, he has decreed we shall not be happy.

CONSIDERED in this view, his prescience, or predetermination, doth not, in the least, clash with his being a law-giver, ruler and judge. And, if you suppose him to have determined an affair of such consequence, according to the *counsel of his own will*, it can only mean, that he did not resolve upon it rashly or precipitantly; that it was not the effect of humor, caprice or passion, but of wisdom and goodness; tho', therefore, he has declared, that "he has mercy upon whom he will have mercy, and hardens whom he pleases." Yet his is not the will of an arbitrary, capricious, or tyrannical being: He wills, or resolves, upon nothing but what is infinitely wise and good; and therefore his will is a most proper rule and measure of judgment. He will show mercy (as he has assured us) to none but the penitent, and harden none but such as remain impenitent and incorrigible, after sufficient means have been tried upon them; and such, indeed, he leaves to themselves, as parents abandon hopelesse and incorrigible children. And, if any man should ask, "Why he will not save the wicked, and harden the pious and well disposed?" Might he not justly answer; "I will show mercy to whom I will show mercy, and whom I see proper I will harden, or punish?"

WE are obliged in this manner, to interpret the texts, which speak of *God's* determining the everlasting state of mankind; if we will understand

understand the several passages of sacred scripture in a perfect harmony and consistence with each other: For there are other texts, which represent *God*, as waiting to see the end, and then examining into the circumstances of the case; that he may act like an upright and impartial judge, and render to every one according as his deeds have been. And from such passages we may learn the purity and justice of *God*. Like a king, who loves his subjects, he wishes them all well; but is resolved to treat every one of them according to their different behaviour; and, when he has waited to see the event, and has been a witness to all that is past, he then proceeds to act as a righteous judge, making the most exact distributions of rewards and punishments, not only in kind, but also in degree.

FROM these considerations, we may learn to order our steps with thought and circumspection; to expect equitable treatment from him at the last; and in the mean time, to refer all the intricate mazes of providence to the clear and impartial decision of that great day: ---such considerations ought to silence every murmur, and cut off all cavils. "Nay, but, O man, who art thou that repliest against *God*? Hast thou considered the case as maturely? is thy wisdom equal to judge of his? or thy goodnesse to be compared to that of the divine being?" He knows best how to manage the creation, with every individual of
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it, --- much better than the most skilful pot-
ter to mold his different lumps of clay.

To conclude, --- *christianity* is not a mat-
ter of mere speculation, but a plain, practical
religion; and, therefore, 'tis revealed in a fa-
miliar manner, and in popular language. The
design of it is to lead sinners to repentance, and
to establish righteous persons in virtue and
piety. All the representations of the nature
and perfections, the designs and actions of
God, are there made with this view. It is,
therefore, to be embraced as a *doctrine ac-*
cording to godlinesse; for *it will teach us that*
good understanding, which all they have who do
God's commandments.

I am, Dear S I R,

Your's, &c.



The E N D.



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